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BICYCLE BOB'S HOT SCORCH



OR SHAKING UP THE STREET-STEERERS.

A STORY OF THE
Schoharie County Hayseed in New York.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,

CHAPTER I.

REUBEN ROCKAWAY FROM SCHOHARIE CO.

"Hold on there, mister! What aire you a-goin' tew do to that boy? If you touch

"THIEF!" HE CRIED. "THIEF! THIEF!" BICYCLE BOB FAIRLY STOOD UPON HIS PEDALS, AND HE BEGAN TO SCORCH AS HE HAD NEVER BEFORE.

him with that stick I'll muss your clothes—I will, by chowder!"

The burly policeman looked up in amazement most profound, into the big, hearty face of a massive countryman past middle age, whose straggling locks and fringe of whiskers were nearly white.

The policeman had by the collar a good-looking, well-dressed lad of fifteen, with his left hand, while in his right he held his club in a threatening manner. The boy was offering no resistance, but was holding fast to the bar of a bicycle from which he had evidently just dismounted.

"What's that you say?" demanded the policeman, with a fierce expression such as would have given a Bowery tough a chilly sensation down the spine and a vision of the Island at the same time, but which did not appear to disconcert the countryman in the least. "You had better 'tend to your own business, uncle, or you may get into trouble."

"This is my business, right here and naow!" the old gentleman from the rural districts declared. "What on airth has the lad been doin' that you aire goin' tew eat him up for't?"

"He has been scorching, that's what!" was the sharp answer. "I know what I am about, old man. I'm going to run him in for it."

In a few brief moments thus occupied, they had passed from one pose to another, naturally. The officer had let go his hold upon the lad's collar for the moment, and had stretched himself to his height and was looking the old countryman in the eyes, while the boy, hands in pockets, stood quietly by.

"Gosh all hickory!" exclaimed the Granger. "Why don't you tackle somebody your size?"

"Maybe you want me to tackle you," suggested the policeman, with great dignity. "Only for your gray hairs, I'd pull you in along with him, for interfering with an officer in the discharge of his duty."

"You would, hey? Wull, naow, jist supposin' you try it on. You need not hold back on account of my gray hairs, not a bit! You would find you had tackled the heftiest old stump you ever tried to pull in your life—you would, by chowder! I am all muscle that ain't bone."

"Well, I have no quarrel with you, old man. Next time do not drop your nickel in the wrong slot, that's all."

"I don't know as I have been a-drop-pin' any nickel, yet, young man."

"Something will drop, if you don't move on."

"I'll move on when I git ready. When I see a great big feller like you a-holdin' fast to a little bit of a feller like this and a-threatenin' him with a club, it make my blood bile, and I say it again—Why don't you tackle somebody your size?"

"Drop it, old man! You are drawing attention. Thank your stars that I am letting you off easy. Come on, boy—"

The officer reached to take the boy by the arm.

"No you don't, by chowder! You stand right there till your uncle gets done talkin' with ye."

The old man had suddenly dropped a big carpetbag he had been holding in his right hand, and, grabbing the policeman by both arms just below the shoulders, he lifted him squarely off his feet and stood him in a new place.

By this time quite a number of people had stopped to see what was going on, though barely a minute had elapsed from the first. The policeman flushed furious-

ly and partly raised his club in a threatening manner, while the juvenile cause of all the trouble laughed.

"Now, then, I want to know what it's all about, anyhow?" the country Samson demanded. "This little feller ain't big enough to take his own part, but, by chowder, I'm big enough to see that he gits a fair show! What was it you said he had been a-doin'?"

"I said he had been scorching, that's what I said," cried the irate officer. "Who are you, anyhow?"

"Who am I, hey? Wull, I'm Reuben Rockaway, that owns the by-gosh biggest farm up in Schoharie county, justice of the peace fur twenty-seven years straight, twelve years postmaster, and once up for the legislature; that's my record. Now, who be you?"

"I am a policeman, as you can see for yourself, and you are making a mistake by interfering with me in the discharge of my duty. I have arrested this boy for riding his bicycle faster than the law allows, and it is my duty to run him in. You may be a big man in your own town, uncle, but you can't expect to have things your own way here in New York City."

"Um! Ridin' fast, was he? Didn't kill nobody, did he? Didn't run over and smash up any kerriges nor street cars, I reckon? If I was you I would let him go this time with a warnin', that's what I'd do. He's only a little chap, anyhow, and he has got a face that strongly 'minds me of a face I used to know a good while ago. I reckon I'd let him go, mister. Git on your masheen, sonny, and see to it that ye don't ride too fast again!"

The crowd, by this time, was large; a good deal of good-natured chaffing was going on, and the policeman was eager enough to have the scene brought to a close.

"Well, I'll let him off this time," he said. "Look out that I don't catch you at the same trick again, my son, that's all."

"I wasn't going any faster 'n the two fellows ahead of me," said the boy, civilly.

"None of your guff!" cried the policeman. "Git!"

The boy had secured his wheel, now, and was ready to start. With a nod to the old man who had come to his rescue, he pedaled away.

"Naow, ain't that better'n draggin' him off to prison?" demanded the old gentleman. "I know you must feel a good deal better'n you would if you had done that."

"That's all right, uncle; say no more about it. Move on, here!" to the crowd. "The show is over."

"Hello! Where's my carpetsack?"

The old man was looking wildly around for his carpetbag, which had suddenly disappeared.

Instantly the policeman cast a sweeping look around, taking in every person within range of his vision, but the carpetbag had completely disappeared from the scene!

From ruddy, the hale old gentleman's face had turned to a chalky whiteness.

"Gosh all hickory!" he cried, "I mustn't lose that bag. It has got dockymints in it of the utmost vally! Bring it back, you thievin' varmint, whoever ye aire!"

He was now thoroughly excited, and raised his voice to a high pitch and motioned wildly with his arms.

His words and antics drew general attention again.

"Who took that bag?" demanded the officer.

Nobody, evidently, had seen it.

"This comes of meddlin' with what didn't consarn me, by chowder!" the aged rustic bewailed. "I was a blame fool for not marchin' right ahead and 'tendin' to my own business! I will give a hundred dollars for that carpetsack back in my hands this minute—I will, by chowder!"

His generous offer, however, did not restore the missing property.

"Was there any mark on it?" asked the officer.

"Yes, it was marked R. R. as plain as could be, on both ends, stitched right into the stuff with yarn. There couldn't be no mistakin' it, if once I sot eyes on it again."

"Which you are not likely to do, I am afraid," said the policeman. "I told you in the first place that you had better mind your own business and move along about it, but you wouldn't take my advice. I guess you will have to whistle for that carpetsack, now."

"Not much I won't whistle fur it!" cried the excited man from Schoharie. "I must have it!—Do you hear? I must have it! And have it I will, if I have to turn this taown up-side down to git it. They know me up to Coblesville, where I hail from, and they will know me here before they git done with me, too, by chowder! You show me the way to the head police, young man."

The policeman had been looking all the time for some indication of the guilty party, but had failed to discover him.

It had been about the cleverest steal that had ever come under his notice.

"All right, uncle; that is the only thing to be done, I guess," said the cop. "Come along with me."

It was the quickest way for him to quiet the old gentleman and break up the crowd he had attracted, so giving a quiet signal to another officer who had by that time come up, he led the old Granger away.

At the police station the old man told his story, that he had come to the city upon a highly important mission, with papers in his carpetbag bearing upon a matter of mystery of long standing, and which he had hoped to be able to clear up at last, thanks to a clew which had recently come into his hands. Not only were the papers important, but valuable, since a property worth half a million dollars was at stake.

He gave a description of the bag, and as close a description of its contents as possible, and said he would call again on the following morning to see if anything had been heard of it. Meantime, he would scout around a little himself, as he expressed it, and see if he could not get on the track of the rascal who had made away with it. "And the good Lord show him mercy if I lay these two hands on him!" he threatened, holding his massive members up to view and working his fingers menacingly. "He will think the hull of Schoharie county has dropped onto him in a lump—he will, by chowder!"

CHAPTER II.

BICYCLE BOB'S SECOND ADVENTURE.

The scene with which this story opens was on one of the thoroughfares of the great metropolis, where the splendid condition of the pavement is a great temptation to bicycle riders to put on a little extra spurt of speed.

Several mishaps had occurred in that vicinity, and only a few days previous to the time under consideration the policemen covernig that section of the city had been instructed to arrest any rider who

exceeded the regulation speed, in order to break it up.

Policeman Hockman was keenly alert on that particular morning, and when he saw three fellows speeding along down the avenue at a high rate he made up his mind that he would make a capture and at once vindicate the majesty of the law and score a point for himself in the favor of his superiors. Accordingly, he made an attempt with the result shown.

The foremost two saw the officer in time to swerve, the one to the right and the other to the left, and escape him; but the third, a mere youth, ran fairly into the bluecoat's arms and was captured.

We have, in a measure, described the lad.

He was about fifteen years of age, well dressed and good-looking, with dark hair and keen eyes.

What happened immediately following the arrest has been shown. Let us now introduce the young Mercury, and then learn what became of him after his rescue from custody.

Robert Ransom, whom his intimate associates had of late dubbed "Bicycle Bob," owing to the fact of his possessing a handsome wheel, small in frame, but high in gear—was a private messenger. He was at home on his wheel, could keep pace with the best of them, and could perform tricks that few dared attempt.

He was the only son of a widowed mother, who, having been left desperately poor, had, nevertheless, been able to make her way in the world and keep her boy by her side. She was a dressmaker, had for many years toiled in obscurity, but at last had found favor with a certain lady of the elite circles and at present was enjoying a large and rapidly increasing patronage.

Bicycle Bob was her most trusted messenger—she now had others besides him, and with the dawn of her prosperity she had made his young heart glad by presenting him with a bicycle, a thing he had long desired to possess. But, it had been conditional, and the condition was that in the following year he would forego the delights of wheeling and enter a school and begin preparation for the business of life.

Needless to say, Bob had agreed to the condition imposed—he would have agreed to almost anything for the sake of possessing such a wheel; but it was a pleasing condition, for, if there was any other thing he really liked it was study. When off his wheel he was into a book immediately.

When he nodded to the old countryman, and started on his way on his wheel there was a feeling of gratefulness alive in his breast for the timely aid the old man had rendered him.

"He was a nice old chap," he said to himself. "Guess I would have been in pickle by this time, if it hadn't been for him. I'll remember his name, for I may fall in with him again sometime. Whew! but wasn't he a Samson, though! His name ought to be Sandow—Hello! what's this?"

Something new had suddenly claimed the lad's attention.

A man was walking hurriedly along, holding in front of him a carpetbag very much like the one Bob had seen in the old countryman's possession!

"I wonder if it can be his?" he quickly asked himself. "If I thought it was, I would holler 'Stop, thief!' for all I'm worth. He is carrying it as if he is afraid somebody behind will see it."

At that moment the man cast an apprehensive look behind him.

Bob had a good look at his face, and

noted that it had a crafty, secretive expression.

In turning his head the other way again the man noticed that the lad was eyeing him keenly, and at sight of the boy he gave a great start of surprise.

He hugged the carpetbag closer, and on looking again and finding that Bob was wheeling in his direction, with his eyes still fixed upon him, the man's face darkened and he ran.

"Stop thief!" cried the boy, at that. "Stop thief! Stop thief!"

Bob felt sure that his suspicion was right, now, and was even more certain of it when the man increased his pace.

It was a thrilling moment for the young bicyclist. His wheel was as completely under the control of his will as if it had been a part of his body, almost, and he made it spin.

He had already come too far from the corner where he had left the old man and the policeman for them to hear his shout above the rumble and rattle of the street's traffic, and the responsibility of the matter rested altogether with himself.

His shouts had at once attracted attention, and he felt sure that the man would be stopped in a few moments. Many persons turned to look after him, and one or two gave chase. And the thought came to the lad—What if he were making a mistake and the man were innocent?

But, he did not believe that such was the case.

They now came to a corner, and the man's first move was as if he intended to keep straight ahead, but, of a sudden, he turned short to the left and darted down a side street.

It was almost too late for Bob to make the turn safely, going at the speed he was making, but, throwing the balance of his body the right way to counterbalance the abrupt turn he made, he rounded the corner almost at a sharp angle and continued the chase.

The man looked back, and his face grew darker than ever.

Bicycle Bob saw him open the carpetbag, take out some papers hurriedly, and, closing it again, fling the bag into the street.

Not only so, but he threw it straight in the path of the bicycle, now almost upon him again, and before Bob could dodge, or do anything to avert it, he ran upon it!

His wheel was brought to a sudden standstill, and the young rider was thrown heavily to the ground.

The man made his escape.

It had all happened in a few brief minutes from the time when Bicycle Bob had first espied the carpetbag.

Some half a dozen men and boys had darted around the corner with him in pursuit of the supposed thief, and they all came to a stop where Bob had met with his accident.

The front wheel of the bicycle had run upon the narrow part of the big carpetbag first, the wider part had caused it to stop with the suddenness described, and the rider took an unceremonious header over the handle-bars and landed some distance away.

For a few minutes Bicycle Bob was partly stunned.

Kind hands lifted him up and bore him to the sidewalk, and the wheel and carpetbag were brought to the curb.

For the moment the object of the pursuit had been forgotten, in the excitement of the accident, and thus it was that the man succeeded in making his escape as noted.

In a few minutes quite a crowd had gathered around the young wheelman, all eager to know what was the matter, save the few who had witnessed the pursuit and the mishap, and even they were curious to know more about it. Their sympathies were all with Bob.

Presently the boy opened his eyes and looked around.

"Did he get away?" he faintly inquired.

"Yes, he got away," said the man who was holding Bob's head. "Whom did he rob, anyhow?"

"A man named Reuben Rockaway," answered Bob, "and I'm sorry I didn't catch that rascal, for Mr. Rockaway is such a nice old man. Where is the carpetbag? I must take that back where I left him."

There were other questions and answers, while Bob was pulling himself together, so to say, and as soon as the boy had regained his grip he mounted his wheel and started back to the scene of his first mishap.

When he arrived there the crowd was gone, and people were moving along in the usual fashion. The old countryman was not to be seen anywhere, nor the policeman with whom Bob had had the little contention. Another officer was not far away, however, and riding up to him and making inquiry, the boy soon learned where the old gentleman had gone, and set out to hunt him up.

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE RUBE LEARNS SOMETHING.

"Gosh all hickory! The same little chap again, officer, and bless my stars if he hain't got my old carpetsack safe and sound!"

Only a little distance from the station had Reuben Rockaway and the officer who had accompanied him thither gone, when they came face to face with Bicycle Bob.

Bob was pedaling right ahead, at the very last limit of city speed, if not indeed a little more, and the policeman calling out to him sharply, he looked up with a start, slowing down instantly. Seeing who it was he turned to the sidewalk.

"At it again, are you?" demanded the policeman.

"That wasn't faster'n the law allows, was it?" queried Bob. "If it was, I guess I'll give up riding."

"Well, see that you don't go any faster'n that, that's all," warned the officer. "Where are you going with that carpetbag, though? Are you trying to get away with it?"

"Gosh all hickory, no!" cried out the old countryman, speaking up for the boy. "He is bringin' it straight to me, can't ye see? Who had it, laddie? How did you git it away from him? I'm goin' to pay you suthin' for this—I am, by chowder!"

He thrust his hand deep into his trousers pocket and drew out a fat, leather-strapped wallet while speaking.

"You had better keep a tight fist on that thing while you are in this town, uncle, if you have got much in it," warned the officer.

Respecting the old man for the giant's strength he had displayed, the policeman had begun to strike up quite a friendship with him and rather liked the old fellow.

"Much obleeged to ye," said Mr. Rockaway, unstrapping the shiny old receptacle, "but I would like to see any two men in this hull town that kin take it away from me. They would find that they had tackled the heftiest job of their lives, I allow."

"I agree with you there, uncle, if they

set about it by force, but that isn't the way they do it here. You will never know when it happens, and so I advise you to keep your clutch on it."

"Well, I'll do that, and if they can git it they'll be welcome to it. Here, boy, here's ten dollars."

Bicycle Bob's eyes opened wide, and he drew back.

"Take it!" the old gentleman urged. "You have earned it, every cent of it."

"But, sir, the carpetbag ain't just as you left it," informed the lad. "The man opened it and took papers out, and then flung it at me and made—"

"The papers gone?"

The old man uttered the words with an almost scream, and his face was gray with alarm.

"Tell what you know about the whole business, boy," interrupted the policeman. "Who was it took the bag, in the first place? and how did you manage to recover it?"

Bicycle Bob quickly stated the facts.

"Opened my carpetsack, did he?" cried the excited man from Schoharie. "Consarn him! but I would jist like tew comb his hair fur him—I would, by chowder!"

"Old man, it looks as if that fellow knew you had valuable papers in your carpetbag, and as if he had been spotting you to get at them," remarked the blue-coat. "Who knew you had such papers with you?"

"Gosh all hickory! It can't be possible that he is the ornery skunk that done it!"

"Who?"

"A slick-tongued varmint that was up to my place not many days ago and put me in possession of the facts, and that brought me here to-day. Boy, what kind of lookin' chap was he?"

"Why, he was a withered kind of fellow, with a sharp mustache and a pointed whiskers, and—"

"The very mortal, by chowder!"

"Then you know him, do you?" asked Officer Hockman.

"I know all I want to of him, fur a pizen imp of Satan, that's what I know!"

"Well, you had better go back to the station, I think, taking the boy with you, and give the captain these additional facts in the matter. Do you know where to find the man?"

"No, that is the wust of it; I don't! I settled with him and thought I was done with him fur good and all; but it seems I wasn't. Let me only lay these hands on him, though, and if I don't make him more withered'n what he is I'm a jayhawker."

The officer knew what power was contained in the old granger's hands.

"Well, it will serve him right," he said. "But, if you don't know where to find him, or anything about it, I would advise you to engage a first-class private detective and put the matter in his hands and let him run the fellow down. You can't do it yourself."

"But, where will I get such a detective?"

"Have you ever heard about Wilson Williams?"

"No, I never did. Who is he?"

"He is one of the keenest private detectives in New York, and his office is not a great ways from here."

"Well, he is my man, then, if you think it will be any use. Can you take me around to his office and introduce me tew him? I'm in taown on business—I am, by chowder!"

The officer smiled at the grim earnestness of the man.

"No, I can't," he said, "for I have got to get back to my post, but this

young street steerer will do it, I don't doubt, for a trifle. Do you know where his office is, my boy?"

"No, but I have heard of him," answered Bob, promptly. "If anybody in New York can find the chap who stole your papers, governor, Williams is the man, sure enough. I'll show you the way there, if the copper will say where the office is."

The policeman mentioned the street and number.

"That isn't a great ways," said Bob, "and it won't be out of my way where I'm going. I'll steer you there, governor. Will you walk or ride?" himself standing ready to mount his wheel.

"Gosh all hickory! You don't think fur a minute that I could ride that aire thing, do you?"

"I didn't mean that," with a laugh. "I meant would you take a car?"

"No, no; I kalkylate my legs aire good for't, if it ain't more'n a couple of miles. You lead the way and I'll keep in tow."

"All right come along then. Ta-ta, copper! I won't run faster'n the regulation speed again, unless I happen to sight the fellow that stole the governor's papers; then I'll scorch, you bet!"

"If you do see him, make sure that you get him this time," was the officer's parting direction.

The old "hayseed" shook hands with the policeman and bade him good-by, with an invitation to come up and see him sometime at his Coblesville place in Schoharie "caounty."

That done, he stepped out after the young street steerer, as the policeman had dubbed Bicycle Bob, with a long stride and swing, his ancient carpetbag in his hand and the frock of his long coat flapping merrily in the breeze. He was a genuine "Reuben."

Many people turned their heads to take a second look at him, as he passed, but he paid no attention to that. He had Bicycle Bob in sight, and had eyes for nothing else, just then.

It was not a great distance to the detective's office.

Bob ran slowly, but at a speed that made the countryman puff a little, nevertheless, by the time their destination was reached.

There Bob stopped and waited for him to come up.

"That theer masheen of your'n went about as fast as I keer to walk, by chowder!" the old chap exclaimed, dropping his carpetbag and putting his foot on it, and taking off his hat and mopping his brow with a huge bandanna. "Now, show me where that detective feller is at, and this same ten dollars is yours for your trouble. You aire a likely lad, and I ruther admire ye."

"Oh! that's all right, uncle," said the boy. "I don't want to take your money, after lettin' that thief get away with your papers the way I did. Put it in your pocket and give it to somebody that needs it worse'n I do. Let's see; you go up to the second floor and look for room number twenty-one, and there you will find your man—or his office. Sofry I can't go with you, but I have got to hustle on an errand. Good-by!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF THE PAST.

The old gentleman stood staring after Bicycle Bob as he pedaled away, still mopping his brow and still holding his carpetbag down with his foot.

A policeman happening along leisurely, stopped and surveyed the oddly attired old man, and following the direction of

his gaze saw the boy on the wheel spinning rapidly away.

"What is it, old fellow?" he familiarly demanded. "That youngster made a swiipe of your long green?"

"Hey, what's that?" the aged innocent questioned.

"Did he get away with your pocket-book?"

"Look 'e here, young man," returned the countryman, measuredly, putting on his hat and stuffing his bandanna into his pocket and picking up his carpetbag in one act, as it were; "what's the matter with you 'police fellers, anyway? Seems to me you have all got a pick on that boy."

"How is that?" asked the officer, amused as well as amazed.

"That's how it is," retorted the man from Schoharie, without explaining. "I had to take his part a spell ago, and might have to do it again if he was within your reach, which I'm glad he ain't. He's honest, is that boy, mark that! He ran down a thief a little while ago and saved my carpetsack for me, and I stand ready to take his part any time."

"Good for him!" exclaimed the officer. "Ah! how do, Mr. Williams!"

"How do, Garrigan!"

A young man, coming up with a brisk stride, had drawn the policeman's attention; there was a quick exchange of names and salute of hands, and the young man started to turn in at the door near which Mr. Rockaway was standing.

The old man had caught the name, and with a quick motion reached out one of his powerful arms and laid hold upon the man's shoulder, bringing him to a stop with a suddenness that must have been surprising.

The young man flashed a look at him instantly, and the policeman took a step forward.

"Jist a minute," the man from Schoharie was saying. "If you aire Mr. Wilson Williams, then you aire jist the man I want to see."

"Well, that is my name," assured the young man, the look in his eyes softening a little. "What do you want to see me for? How did you know— But, you heard my name."

"You struck a straight furrow that time," averred the countryman. "When I heard the name I guessed right sudden that you was the man I had come to find, and I wanted to make sure of it before you got away, that's all. As to what I want to see ye fur, that is another matter."

"Well, come right up to my office. So-long, Garrigan!"

"Good-by, policeman," said the old fellow, offering his hand. "If you should ever git up Schoharie way, and should strike Coblesville, don't fail to ask fur Reuben Rockaway—that's my name."

The officer took the proffered hand and went away laughing, while the detective led the way up to his office, a smile on his lips.

He opened the door for Mr. Rockaway, and closed it when they had entered.

"Now, then, sit down, Mr. Rockaway," he invited, "and let me hear your story. By the way, who sent you to me? How did you learn of me?"

"Why, a police feller gave me your number, and a lad on a bicycle towed me around as fur as your door. I was comin' up as soon as I'd got my wind. Aire you ready fur business now?"

"All ready, uncle. Let 'er go!"

Thereupon the old gentleman settled himself back in his chair, laid his big hat on his lap, and related the events that have already been chronicled.

"And now you want me to recover those papers for you, eh?" asked the detective.

"I want you to help me with the whole business, that is what I want," declared Mr. Rockaway. "That is what I am here for, to clear up the whole mystery, if it can be done."

"Ah! that takes us into deeper water then, at once. You will have to go back to the very beginning, so far as you know it, and give me all the particulars down to date. Then, maybe, I shall be able to be of some service to you in clearing the matter up."

"That is jist what I want, sir, jist what I want, and you seem to be jist the kind of a man that I wanted to fall in with. If you kin unravel the tangle I'll reward ye handsome, I promise."

"Very well; I'll see what can be done for you. You said, I believe, that your business here was highly important, that you had valuable papers in that carpet-bag bearing upon a mystery, and having to do with a fortune of about half a million. That the man who stole the papers was one who had been out to your place recently, and it was upon some information that he gave you that you came here to New York."

"You have got it right, by chowder!"

"Well, it looks like a scheme on his part to get possession of those papers. In fact, it is plain on the face of it, I think."

"You aire right, of course. It must be so, else how would he be on hand where he was, and why would he steal my carpetbag that sly way, and walk off with it?"

"Question's right to the point. Now, your story."

"You want to go clear back to the beginnin'?"

"Yes, so far as concerns this mystery you speak of."

"All right; that takes me to the time of my second marriage. My second wife was a widdy when I married her, and she had two sons, Henry and Robert, five and three years old, respectively."

"Go on, sir."

"That was my second wife, you understand. By my first wife I had an only darter, as sweet a gal as ever lived. Her name was Eliza, after her mother. She was younger than the boys of my second wife, four years younger than Henry and two years younger than Robert. Are you keepin' up?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Rockaway, I follow you, certainly."

"Well, I only wanted to be sure that ye did, that was all. It ain't plain to some folks, first tellin'. Now, my second wife died and I married again, the woman who is my present companion, and by whom I have had quite a number of children—That, howsumdever, don't concern what I am comin' at. I want to make it all clear to ye as I go along."

"I will stop you, sir, when there is anything I do not understand."

"All right; do it. Now, my second wife made me the sole guardian over her two boys by her first husband, and left me sole trustee of a big estate that was to come to them when the youngest came to age. I took keer of them, sent them off and eddycated them, and done by 'em jist as well as I could 'a' done by my own, if they had been my own, which they wasn't, as I have said. And now I came to the beginnin' of the mystery:

"When Robert came to age, and I went to settle up the estate, I discovered an unexpected obstacle in the way. The boys were declared illegitimate by their father's brother, and search as I would

I couldn't discover any proofs to the contrary. The estate is in England, and although the present holder can't sell it, by some hook or crook of law that I could never rightly get into my head, yet he is holdin' fast to it, and the rightful heirs can't touch it—for I believe that those two boys were jist as legitimate as anybody that was ever born."

"Where are these sons now?"

"Hold on; that's only half of the story. Both the boys had fallen in love with my darter, and I was willin' that she should marry Henry, seein' that he was the oldest; but, woman like, she went by contrary and made up her mind that she loved Robert and wanted to throw herself away on him. I objected to that, and what did she do but elope with Robert and marry him, anyhow, on the day that he was of age. Then I made the discovery I have mentioned, that neither of the boys could touch the English estate, owing to lack of proofs of their legitimacy. See how it was?"

"Perfectly clear, sir. Have you anything more to tell?"

"Well, the rest of it concerns my darter and brings the matter down to the present. You see, I had ferbid her marryin' Robert, tellin' her if she done it she was no child of mine, and needn't never darken my doors again; but that made no difference to Eliza. She loved him and was bound to have him, and she got him. Henry moped around for a spell, and then, when he found he couldn't tech the English fortune, he struck out for himself, and that was the last I heard of him, 'cept by hearsay, for a long time. Robert disappeared about a year after marryin' my darter, and she came back to me with tears in her eyes and a babe in her arms, and begged me to take her in, but I wouldn't yield, the more so as she hadn't a scrap of proof that she had really been married to the rascal she had eloped with, though she declared she had."

"I turned her out, and that was the last I ever heard of her from that day to this. I repented of it, and made search for her, for she was the idol of my heart, was Eliza, but it wasn't no use, she couldn't be found. That was fifteen years ago, and I would give all I am worth in the world if I could only find her and ask her forgiveness before I die."

"But I must get on to the strangest part of the matter. A few days ago a man came to my place, giving his name as Thomas Smyth, and saying that he was a solicitor from England. He had formerly had charge of the big estate, but having had a falling out with the uncle of the two boys, he had, out of revenge, brought me the papers proving the sons legitimate, and the uncle a usurper. He had heard, he said, that I had a grandchild by one of the heirs, and he advised me to lose no time in establishing his claim and legitimacy in the English courts. What was more: he said he would like nothing better than to undertake the job. All he wanted was his expense paid. I paid him what he wanted for fare, and so on, and he left the papers in my keeping, and that was the last of him; but a day or two later came a letter saying that if I wanted to get on track of my daughter I must come to New York immediately, and bring all the papers with me; and here I am!"

"Now, then, what d'ye think of it all, Mr. Williams? Why should that man steal the papers back again, after he had once turned 'em over to me? Do you think you can take hold of it and sift it to the bottom?"

The detective was thoughtful.

CHAPTER V.

ROCKAWAY'S BAD MEMORY.

"This is a deeper and bigger matter than I looked for when you set out to tell it, Mr. Rockaway," asserted Mr. Williams, after a few moments of silence.

"Gosh all hickory!" was exclaimed, "it is too hefty for me to carry alone—it is, by chowder!"

"Where were you to meet this man Smyth?" the detective inquired.

"Why, here in New York, of course."

"Certainly; but was there not some particular place of meeting mentioned? How were you to come together?"

"Gosh all hickory!" cried Mr. Rockaway, partly leaping up from his chair, "I hadn't thought of that! It is a big taown to meet a man in, unless ye know where to meet him."

"Rather; and he mentioned no place?"

"No; only said come to New York."

"And what did you intend doing, before you lost those papers? You must have had some plan laid out."

"Well, now, I had never been in New York only twice before in my life, and then I stopped at the Astor House. I intended goin' there and waitin' fer him to turn up."

"And you would have had a long wait, once the papers were in his possession. Otherwise, he would soon have found you, not a doubt of it. Mr. Rockaway, it was a scheme to get you to the city to get those papers away from you again."

"It looks so now; I swow it does."

"Hardly room for a mistake, I think. But we will see what can be done in the matter, sir."

"Dang the varmint! I don't believe I'll ever set eyes on him again, now that he has got what he wanted. How on airth aire ye goin' to set about findin' him?"

"We must match wits with him, and see which will come out ahead. You said he came from England."

"So he told me."

"And that was probably so. We'll give some attention to the steamers going out and probably will find him that way."

"Gosh all hickory! but you have a brain fer plans and skeems! Now, I wouldn't 'a' thought of that in a month of Sundays. Go ahead, Mr. Williams; I leave it all to you."

"That was a very simple thought, Mr. Rockaway. If he suspects that he will be watched for, he may remain in hiding, or get out of the country by some other route, and that will greatly increase the difficulty. But we can arrange to learn if he reaches England."

The old countryman could only sit and stare. This was pressing the matter broader and more rapidly than he had ever dreamed possible.

"But there is one thing puzzles me, Mr. Rockaway."

"And what is that?"

"Why should he want the papers back again, having once turned them over to you?"

"He must 'a' repented of his good action, I take it. I don't see any other explanation that will fit the case, do you?"

"Not unless you happened to have other papers that he wanted to get hold of, and took this means of doing it, believing that you would bring all papers with you."

"Gosh all hickory!"

"Then you had other papers?"

"Yes."

"And had them with you?"

"I did, certain sure, every scrap of 'em."

"What were they?"

"Well, some dockments of the mother of the two boys, and my legal 'pintment as their guardian, and sich."

"We may be right and we may be wrong, Mr. Rockaway, but it looks to me as if we are coming at it now. Instead of being at enmity with that English brother, Smyth may be his tool!"

By this time the man from Schoharie was pacing up and down the room, swinging his big hat vigorously, and his coat tails swaying with every stride he took. He was in a great state of excitement. Revelations were being thrust upon his simple mind such as he had never dreamed of.

"Gosh all hickory!" he ejaculated. "I'm madder'n a wet hen—I am, by chowder! To think how I let 'em take me in, and me twenty-seven years a justice of the peace, and twelve years a postmaster, to say nothin' about being once up for the legislature! If I could lay these two hands on that villain of a slick-tongued liar, I would muss him up—I would, by chowder!"

"Keep cool, Mr. Rockaway, and control your temper. There is nothing to be gained by getting hot and angry. I will take the first steps in the case at once, and you had better go to the Astor House, as you planned, and stay there, so I can find you if I want you. If you do not hear from me, come here about this hour to-morrow, and I will let you know what progress I have made. At the same time, keep your eyes and ears open, and let me know if you hear of anything of importance."

"All right, jist as you say. There ain't no denyin' that you aire a better man fur the job'n what I am, and I leave it all to you. Which way is the Astor House from here?"

He was given the direction, and took his leave.

For some time after he had gone the detective sat revolving the case in his mind. He roused up, presently, attended to some business that was awaiting his attention, then closed his office and went out.

Meanwhile, Bicycle Bob had performed the errand that had taken him to that part of the city, and was returning.

He made his return by way of the detective's office.

The boy had taken quite a fancy to the hale old countryman, whose face, somehow, made him think of a great big ruddy apple, and he thought, perchance, he might fall in with him again.

At the office, however, nothing was seen of him, and Bob naturally had no excuse for going in to make inquiry. He thought of it, but the idea came to him that, maybe, the old gentleman might think he had come with the hope of getting a reward, after all; so he rode by and continued on his way.

He had not gone a great distance, however, when he caught sight of a familiar figure.

It was that of the veteran countryman, who was shaking hands most heartily with some man whom he had evidently just met, and who appeared to be a warm and welcome friend.

"Hello!" said the boy to himself. "Is that some friend, I wonder? or is it a bunco runner taking the old gentleman in? Guess I will keep 'em in sight, and see about that. They shan't fool the old fellow if I can help it, and I have got time and to spare, now."

He stopped and dismounted some distance from them, and watched.

The stranger appeared to be making much of the old gentleman, shaking his hand long and heartily, taking him by

the arm when they unclasped, and finally slapping him familiarly on the shoulder.

"That looks like funny-biz to me," inferred Bicycle Bob. "I'll bet a penny it is some chap picking the old man up. Goodness help him, is all I have to say, if he gets the old fellow's dander up, for I believe he could throw him over the top of a house."

Bob's surmise was right; the man was one whom Reuben Rockaway had never seen before in his life, that he could remember!

Just about to turn a corner, taking the direction Detective Williams had given him, he had come face to face with the man, who had stopped squarely in his way, exclaiming:

"Reuben Rockaway, by the horn spoon!"

He held out his hand in a way that admitted of no refusal, smiling in the heartiest fashion.

"That is my name," acceded the countryman, giving his hand because he felt obliged to do so, "but I be hanged if you ain't got the best of me. I can't seem to place ye—I can't, by chowder!"

"Don't remember me, Mr. Rockaway! Don't you remember Jones, the drummer, that used to come through your place a couple of years ago? I used to drop in and see you in your post-office there at Coblesville almost every trip. But, I had a beard then."

"Well, I am glad to meet ye, Mr. Jones, even if I can't remember ye. I never was good at rememberin' names and faces, and a man in a public place meets a good many different persons in the course of a year."

"But I couldn't forget Uncle Reuben, you see," taking him familiarly by the arm. "I would know your face among ten thousand, sir. How are you, anyhow?"

"Oh! I'm tolerable, thank 'e; how are you?"

"Never was better, sir. How are all the folks up your way? How are the crops this year?"

"Tolerable, tolerable, Mr. Jones. Old man Rubble lost his wife about a month ago, and that has sorter broke the old man up. His son is runnin' the Eagle House now."

"You don't tell me! That is too bad. Mrs. Rubble was one of the finest women I ever met in my life, Mr. Rockaway—anyhow, I thought so. But, how goes it with you yourself, old man? You look as hale and hearty as you did the very first time I saw you!"

He gave him a familiar slap on the shoulder, with that.

"Tolerable, as I told you," assured the old gentleman. "I have been havin' a consarned time of it, though, ever since I landed in taown this morning."

"Indeed! How is that? Come, let's go into some quiet place for a chat. Don't suppose you drink anything strong—hang me if I remember how you stand on that ground."

"Nothing stronger than my own cider, and that only when it's new, as anybody that ever knowed me order know," declared the old man. "But, I don't mind takin' a rest some'rs, fur hang me if I don't begin to feel tuckered in the legs. I've been goin' around like a colt—I have, by chowder!"

"Well, here is the nicest place you could think of, right at hand, a bang-up restaurant, where you can have anything you want, a glass of milk if you say so. I have got an appointment with a friend here, too, so it will come in right nice. Come along, old friend, and we'll have the best half-hour together you ever spent in your life!"

CHAPTER VI.

BICYCLE BOB'S GOOD SERVICE.

"Now, that may be all right," said Bicycle Bob to himself, as he saw the stranger lead the old gentleman into the restaurant, "but it's my solemn conviction that it isn't. I think I'll hover around a little, and see what comes of it, before I go further."

Accordingly, he led his wheel up to an iron post near the front of the restaurant, chained it there, and then loitered into the place.

Quick to take in what was to be seen, he saw that the old gentleman and his friend had taken seats at one of the tables, and that the man from Schoharie had his back towards the door.

Bob sauntered leisurely down the room, and took a seat behind Mr. Rockaway, and ordered a glass of fresh milk and a bun.

He was near enough to hear, if they talked in ordinary tones.

Mr. Rockaway was saying:

"But, that boy overhauled the thief and got my carpetsack away from him, and brought it straight back to me. He was as fine a little lad as I ever set my eyes on, and as brave as fine."

"But, that didn't bring back the papers you mentioned."

"No, but I am bound to have 'em, if I have to turn New York all inside out to get 'em—I am, by chowder!"

Bicycle Bob could not help but feel a little thrill of pleasure at such favorable mention of himself, and felt his face flush.

"And I wish that I might be of some help to you in that line, Mr. Rockaway, on my word I do. But, I don't imagine I would be of much use at that kind of work. I can do my share of drumming up trade on the road, but if it came to detective work I would not be in it."

"No, I s'pose not, I s'pose not. But, I have got a detective on the case, and he is goin' to have them papers back again or bust a-tryin'."

"What's his name?"

"Williams—Wilson Williams."

Bicycle Bob saw the man give a start at mention of the name.

"I have heard of him," he said. "You couldn't have got a better man in all New York."

"Glad tew hear you say so, fur I want the best that money kin buy. I am determined to have them papers back, or know the reason for't. How long since you was up to Coblesville?"

The other made answer, and Bob felt uncertain about his suspicion. Perhaps this was indeed a friend of the old gentleman.

They talked on, and the boy sipped his milk slowly.

Presently another man came up and gave the old countryman's companion a familiar slap on the shoulder.

"Waiting for me, Jones, I see," he said.

The other looked up, as did also Mr. Rockaway, and Jones said:

"Here you are, eh, Jarvis? Mr. Rockaway, my friend, Mr. Jarvis. Take a seat, old fellow."

"Glad to know you, sir," and Jarvis gave his hand to the countryman. "No, can't stop a minute. Dropped in to tell you. Have got to go all the way down to the — Bank to cash a check for a fellow waiting outside—"

"Whose?" interrupted Jones, thrusting his hand into his pocket.

"Maybe I can help you out."

"Brown and Robinson's."

"As good as gold for any amount. How much is it?"

"Seven hundred and twenty dollars—" "Whew! I can't touch that. Too bad you have to go way down there, for I wanted to see you. How soon will you be back?"

"Can't be back under an hour. If I had a couple of hundred I could fix the fellow out all right. I have got five hundred with me. You see, he can't get it without being identified."

"I have got about a hundred— Hold on, maybe Mr. Rockaway can help you out, and we can all go down to the bank together, after he rests himself awhile, and you can make it all right with him. Do you happen to have the amount about you, Mr. Rock—"

"No, no," interposed Jarvis; "that is imposing too much upon a stranger at first meeting, Jones. Not that there is any risk, for he can hold the check, for matter of that—seven hundred security for one, but I wouldn't expect him to extend such a favor to a stranger. No, no; I'll have to go down with the fellow, and will have to ask to be excused—"

"Hold on, young man!" spoke up Uncle Reuben, thrusting his hand deep down into his trousers pocket. "If I kin save you all that trouble and bother I'll do it, sartin. I'm never without a little of the good in my clothes, you kin rely, and I've got a couple of hundred here that's doin' nothin' at present. Where is the check, young man? If you are willin' to go five hundred on it, I'm not afraid to put up the other two—"

"Uncle Rockaway," piped up a youthful voice at that juncture, "don't you do it!"

The two fellows started and stared, and the old countryman half sprang from his chair to look around, the voice sounding familiar in his ears.

"Gosh all hickory!" he exclaimed, finishing the process of rising, "if it ain't my little friend again! This is the boy I was tellin' you about, Jones, and there ain't a brighter in all—"

"Wait a minute, boss," interrupted Bob. "Do you know these two men? If you don't, I want to warn you to look out for 'em, that's all! They may be all right, but it don't do to let go of your money in that fashion unless you do. If it is all regular, they won't find any fault."

The old man shoved his wallet down into his pocket again.

"Certainly he knows us," asserted Jones, with a good deal of dignity. "I wouldn't be so fresh, if I were you, sonny."

"But, do you know 'em, that is the question, Uncle Rockaway?" persisted the lad. "'Cause if you don't I will call in a policeman for you and have 'em introduced—"

"Why, this feller knows me all right," avowed the old countryman, "and the other one is his friend—"

"Yes, but do you know them—honest, now?"

"Look here, boy, you are making a great ado about nothing," averred the one called Jarvis. "I haven't asked Mr. Rockaway for any money; I don't want any of his money. Thank you kindly for your offer, Mr. Rockaway. See you later, Jones. I have got to be going."

"So-long, Jarvis! Sorry this happened, Mr. Rockaway. Boy, you had better be careful how you raise suspicions against a man's character. Wait for me, Mr. Rockaway, I must speak to Jarvis just a minute. Be right back again."

With a wave of the hand, Jones, too, made for the door, and both fellows quickly disappeared from sight.

Mr. Rockaway stood and stared after them a moment, then turned to Bicycle Bob.

"I'm glad to see you again, laddie," he said, "but I'm sorry you hurt the feelin's of those two men that way. They hadn't asked me fur any money—"

"You dear old innocent!" exclaimed Bob, taking hold of the friendly extended hand. "You didn't know it, but they were preying on that great big heart of yours, and I'll bet a penny on it!"

"No, no; I can't believe it, boy." "All right; you wait and see. They were in a hurry to get away, you will agree to that."

"Yes, but Jarvis had business, and Jones is coming right back again. I hope you'll apologize to him when he comes, for I was telling him what a nice boy you are."

"All right; if he comes back I'll apologize," assured Bob, with a light laugh. "You won't see his shadow in this place again in a month, though, uncle."

"You think not?" "I'm sure of it. The fact is, Uncle Rockaway, you have been in the hands of a couple of bunco steerers, or confidence men."

"Haw! haw! haw!" the old man laid back his head and laughed heartily. "Now I know you are mistaken, sonny. I read the papers, I do, even if I do come from Schoharie County, and I know their games."

"And yet you fell right into their trap!"

"I say it wasn't a trap, boy. They didn't come to me with no false name, and say, 'How are ye, Brown?' and so on, like that; not a bit of it. This fellow Jones walked right up to me like a man and called me by my own full name, right out, and knowed where I hailed from, and all about me."

"But, did you know him? That is the point I am after, uncle."

"Well, no, but—" "That settles it, old chappie; I have saved you a clean two hundred dollars, besides your carpetbag, and I'm the happiest boy in all New York this minute!"

The truth began to dawn upon Mr. Rockaway at last. He looked towards the door and was silent for fully half a minute, watching for the return of Jones, and as he did not put in his appearance, turned at length to Bob and made this rejoinder:

"Well, mebbly you aire right, sonny. I have to own that we live in a generation wiser'n serpents. Come, let's git out of here and take a full breath."

He held Bob by the hand and marched straight to the door and out.

Casting a quick look in each direction, he failed to discover either of the two young men who had so cleverly tried to impose upon him.

"Yes, you must 'a' been right, laddie," he declared, "and yet I would 'a' been willin' to let that feller take my hull pocketbook, that honest he looked. I am much obliged to ye."

"Don't mention it, uncle. You don't want to trust *anybody* here unless you know the party dead sure. See?"

"I begin to see, I reckon. But, thar is one thing puzzles me."

"What is that?"

"How did he know my name and where I was from, and all that, if what he said wasn't so?"

"How did he know it? Why, you dear old innocent, didn't you shout out your name and history to that policeman who collared me just as you came along? And maybe you have done it again for all I know."

"Gosh all hickory! That explains the

hull business, and what a blind old jack-ass I have been, anyhow. Reckon I'll be more careful how I pass my name around here, fur I find there's some things I don't know, old as I am. By the bye, boy, what is your name?"

"Robert Ransom, sir."

CHAPTER VII. BEST MAN WINS.

Bicycle Bob was greatly surprised to see the old gentleman's face turn instantly pale.

He thought he must be sick, at the first instant, but, in the next, he discovered that such was not the case.

The old gentleman laid a hand on his shoulder with a clasp that was almost painful in its firmness, and looked steadily at him.

"Gosh all hickory!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "First it is your face, and now it is your name! Tell me, boy, what is your father's—your mother's name?"

It was Bob's turn to grow excited.

He thought the old man must have taken leave of his senses. What did it matter to him who he was? What right had he to ask his father's and mother's name?

"Tell me, tell me!" the old gentleman kindly persisted. "Your face reminds me of some one, and now your name is one that I used to know. Answer my questions, my laddie, and don't be afraid of me."

"Well, my father is dead," said Bob, "and my mother is Madam Ransom."

"Yes, but her name! her name!"

"I don't know it, sir."

"You don't know your own mother's name!"

"No, sir."

Such was the fact, strange as it may seem. Bob had never heard his mother's first name in his life! He had never heard her called anything but madam!

To him she had always been mamma—the dearest, fondest mother that ever lived, as he verily believed, and it came like a strange new thought to him that she must have a first name, old as he was.

Reuben Rockaway looked the amazement he felt.

"Do you mean to tell me that you do not know what your mother's first name is, my lad?"

"That's honest, sir. I never heard it in my life, and never had a thought about it till this minute. I'll ask her as soon as I get home."

"And I'm going home with ye—I am, by chowder!"

Bob felt alarmed.

"No, no; that won't do, sir!" he cried in haste.

"Why won't it do?"

"Because, mamma will not be expecting you, sir, and you don't know my mamma. I must be off, sir. I am late as it is. I hope you won't get into any more such bad company, sir. Maybe I'll see you again."

Bob had dodged to his wheel and unlocked it from the post.

"Boy, hold on, for the love of heaven, hold on!" cried the old man, in greatest excitement. "I must know more about you before you leave me! You shall not go until you have at least told me where—"

He was shouting so loudly that Bob grew alarmed, as people were beginning to be attracted, and a crowd was likely to gather.

"Some other time, uncle," he called out, pleasantly, at the same time mounting his wheel, and with a wave of the hand he went spinning away up the street, the old man running after him.

"Stop him! Stop him!"

So cried the old man, in voice like a bellow.

He left the sidewalk and took to the street, where he would have more room to run.

The brim of his hat was up in front, his long coat flapped after him like sails spanking on the turn of a tack, while he held his carpetbag with both hands in front.

The people who saw him laughed.

"Go in, Reuben!" some fellow shouted, not knowing that happened to be the countryman's real name.

Bicycle Bob, meantime, seeing that the old man was raising an excitement, and not wanting to get mixed up in it, put on a little speed.

The high gear of his wheel required him to exert himself, but every time he pressed a pedal he "got there," and it took him but a few moments to turn a corner and lose himself.

On hearing his name called, the old gentleman from the rural districts stopped short, puffing like a good fellow.

"Who is that knows me?" he demanded, yanking off his hat and applying his bandanna.

This, of course, raised another laugh, and nobody answered.

"Who was it hollered my name?" the old chap demanded, with a showing of anger. "Does everybody in Noo York know me?"

At that the laugh loudened into a roar, and people on both sides of the street stopped to look at the old "Reuben" who was unwittingly making such an exhibition.

"Gosh all hickory!" the old fellow cried, as he mopped away with one hand and fanned himself with his big hat with the other, while he held his carpetbag tightly between his knees. "What is the matter with ye all, anyhow? Ye 'mind me of a passel of jackasses—ye do, by chowder!"

Again there was a roar, and by that time a couple of policemen came running to the scene.

"Hello! what's the matter here?" demanded one.

"What's happened, old man?" the other.

"That is jist what I, by-gosh want tew know," asseverated Mr. Rockaway.

"Yes, but what is it?"

"Been robbed?"

"Gosh all hickory! Do I look like a man that could be robbed in open daylight?" was demanded. "I kalkylate they would have a time doin' that leetle trick—I do, by chowder!"

"What is all this excitement about?" one of the officers inquired of the crowd.

"Don't know," the response from a score at once.

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Takin' in the free show, that's all."

"Then you had better move on about your business. Come, old man, you don't want to be standing here making a show of yourself. Where do you want to go, anyhow?"

"I'm goin' to the Astor House, when I git ready, that's where I'm goin'," was the straight-out response. "It's a pity that a feller can't stop to wipe his head without all creation stoppin' too to look on and make fun of him. I reckon I kin buy and sell any tarnel one of 'em—I do, by chowder!"

"Well, that's all right, uncle; but you must move on."

"I must move on, hey?"

"Yes, it is against the law to have crowds gathered."

"Gosh all hickory! You don't call me a crowd, do ye? I'm only one man!"

"Yes, but you are drawing the crowd,

don't you see. Come, now, move along and have no trouble about it."

"Gee-whittaker! Who is makin' trouble, I want tew know? If you don't want a crowd, jist make 'em git up and git eout, that is all yeou have got tew do, I kalkylate."

In his indignation, the dialect of his native county came out on top, and his ruddy face became florid. He thrust his bandanna away, clapped his hat on to his head, and placed his knuckles on his hips in defiance of police in general and these two in particular.

Meantime the crowd was increasing rapidly.

"Come, old man, we don't want to be rough with you," urged the other officer. "You have not done anything that we know of, and we don't want to run you in for a little thing like this. Pick up your grip, now, and move on and that will be the end of it. The crowd won't budge while you are making a show of yourself in this fashion."

"Makin' a show of myself, am I? Well, by gosh a'mi'ty if it is makin' a show of myself tew stop and wipe my head, let 'em stare, ef they want tew! You aire right that I hain't done nothin', you aire, and if yeou lay one finger onto me you will think the hull of Schoharie caounty has dropped right down kerplunk on top of ye—yeou will, by chowder! I'm a man of peace, I am, but by the great horn spoon I can't stand everything!"

The two officers had had time to take a good survey of the old countryman by this time, and they now looked at each other.

Somehow, they seemed to understand that they had better not irritate him further.

"All right, uncle; you are all right," said one, and they gave their attention at once to the disposition of the crowd, leaving the old countryman to move away muttering to himself—a happy way out of what might have been a "diffikilty."

"Come, now, move on here!" the two officers cried, making at the crowd on the sidewalks, and the crowd scattered and moved without further telling. No one among them had any desire to remain longer, now that the "show" was over, much less to run the risk of being "run in."

As for "Uncle" Reuben, he left the scene full of the belief that he had taken the two policeman down a peg.

"Some folks think they own this taown," he muttered, "but I kalkylate they don't own as much of it as they think they do. Gosh all hickory! What aire we a-comin' to, if a free-born American citizen can't stop to wipe the sweat from his forehead? Too bad that boy got away from me before I found out somethin' about him; I may never see him again this side of kingdom-come."

He trudged on his way, and in due course, after numerous inquiries and numerous settings right, arrived, hot and weary, at his destination.

"This is the place," he said to himself, with a look at the trusty old landmark, "but hang me if I would 'a' knowed the place, hardly, the way the taown has been growin' around it."

Going in by the front entrance, he mounted the stairs and dropped his carpetbag on the floor in front of the clerk's desk.

"Gosh all hickory!" he greeted; "I thought I was never a-goin' tew git here. You jist put me down, will ye, mister, and show me a room where I kin stretch out and rest a spell. I'm Reuben Rockaway, from Coblesville, Schoharie caounty—"

"Mr. Rockaway, as I live!"

So exclaimed a man who came along just as the old ruralite was giving his address—a man with a sharp mustache and pointed beard, and with just one look at him the old man reached out his long arm and took him by the collar.

"Yas, Reuben Rockaway, as you live!" he cried. "Hand over them 'ar papers, now, as suddent as you know how!"

CHAPTER VIII.

REUBEN ROCKAWAY'S ALLY.

That there was astonishment there goes without saying.

The clerk dropped his pen and held up his hands, everybody within hearing stopped to look, and a couple of porters made haste to the rescue.

"Wh—what is the meaning of this, Mr. Rockaway?" gasped the man with the pointed beard. "I—I have no papers, as you well know."

"You can't come that game over me!" cried the excited old countryman. "You aire the chap that took my carpetsack."

"On my honor, sir—"

"Hand 'em over, or by the great horn spoon, I'll shake ye right out'n your boots! I will, by chowder!"

"Here! none of this!" cried the porters.

The two mentioned, and now another with them and the clerk besides, laid hands on the old man, and forced him to release his hold upon the man with the pointed beard.

"We can't have anything of this kind here, sir," announced the clerk, severely. "You must be peaceable, or we'll have to hand you over to the police."

"Who keers a fig fur the police?" cried the honest but mistaken old man. "I don't. This man stole my papers, and—"

"You are mistaken, Mr. Rockaway. You wrong me."

"Didn't you take my carpetsack when I was talkin' with that police feller a spell ago?"

"I have not been out of this house to-day, sir."

"Kin you prove that?"

"Fortunately, I can. Believe me, sir, you are mistaken!"

"Gosh all hickory! It is mighty funny how the chap could be mistaken, fur he described ye exact."

"What chap?"

"The one that saw ye take the carpetsack and that run ye down and made ye fork it over."

"No one saw me doing anything of the kind, Mr. Rockaway. I have not been out of the house, as one of the colored men can amply testify, for I have been giving him no end of bother."

"Then who can it 'a' been?"

"You say a pointed beard, he had?"

"Yes; sharp mustache and pointed beard."

"Well, there may be many men in this great city answering that description."

"Yes, but how would they know I was comin' to Noo York? How would they know I had the papers with me? And, why would they want to git hold of them papers? Answer me that."

"Look here, Mr. Rockaway; I think we had better go and talk this over in private. There is something back of this, sure as you are born."

"Bet your hosses there is somethin' back of it, and I mean to know what it is."

"Well, will you come?"

"Of course I'll come, fur I don't mean to let you out of my sight till I am double sure you are tellin' me the truth."

"Come on, then, and I'll try to convince you."

"Wait; what about that aire room, mister?" to the clerk. "I have been here before, as mebbly you don't remember, but I have, and my money talks."

"You may have a room; certainly, sir."

After a little talk, fixing the price and locality of the room, it was decided that the interview should take place in it, Reuben saying he wanted to kick off his boots and cool his feet.

Needless to say, a porter remained near the door of that room, and a detective was within call.

When they had gone into the apartment and closed the door, Mr. Rockaway flung his carpetbag into a corner, threw off his hat and coat, and removed his boots, before he said a word.

"Gosh all hickory!" he exclaimed. "Never got so hot in my life hayin' in July, as I have this mornin'. Now, then, Mr. Thomas Smyth, I am ready fur that aire talk. If it wasn't you that meddled with my belongin's, I want you to tell me who it was."

"How can I do that, sir?"

"It was you sent fur me, anyhow."

"I sent for you?"

"Gosh all hickory! Are yeou a-goin' to try to git out of *that*, too?"

"On my word of honor, Mr. Rockaway, I have not sent for you at all. I have had no idea of sending for you."

"You set there and tell me that?"

"I swear it, sir."

Old Reuben took up his coat, felt in a pocket, and, fumbling for a moment, produced a letter, which he opened and thrust in the man's face.

"You didn't write that?" he demanded.

The man looked amazed.

"No, sir," he said, "I did not write it."

"But, your name is to it."

"I see it is, and some scoundrel has forged it. Mr. Rockaway, there is something back of this deeper than I at first thought possible."

"What is it?"

"That is for us to find out, sir."

"Yes, but how aire we a-goin' to do it? That is the question."

"First of all, tell me the whole story, just as it happened. I am in this thing with you, now."

Tell the story the old man did. The English solicitor was studying the letter the whole time he was listening to the recital.

"You say the boy told you the man had a sharp ended mustache and a pointed beard," he made remark when the old man had concluded.

"That was it, and that was what made me think it was you."

"Yes, I see how it was, and you are in a measure to be excused for it. But was that all the description he gave you?"

"Why, he called him a withered chap, I believe—"

"Ah-ha!"

"And as you are ruther lean—"

"Yes, and have some wrinkles; but, would you call me withered, sir?"

"Wull, no; can't say as I would."

"But, you would say it of John Ransom, at sight—"

"John Ransom?"

"Yes."

"Then you think it was—"

"I am sure it was he who robbed you of the papers!"

"Gosh all hickory! That bein' the case, we mought jist as well hang our harps on the willers and whistle our tunes, I reckon."

"It looks so, for I cannot conceive

of his having those papers in his possession and not destroying them, after the experience he has just had with me, the old Shylock!"

"What is goin' to be done?"

"You must consult a detective, and place the matter in his hands."

"That is what I have done, sir. I haven't allowed no grass to grow in my shadder since it happened."

"Ah! that is something, then. But, you have, of course, given the wrong impression. Your detective will lose valuable time looking for me, I am afraid, sir."

"And if he finds ye, that will prove that he is good fur somethin', anyhow."

Mr. Rockaway was a shrewd old fox, even if he was green in the city.

"Yes, but meantime the others may get away."

"Others? Then there is more'n one?"

"It is pounds to shillings, sir, that the old rascal's nephew is with him in it."

"You don't mean Henry?"

"That is his name, sir."

"Then is it possible—"

"Is what possible, sir?"

"I was thinkin' of the past. You and I have talked that all over, you know."

"Certainly."

"The mother of the boys had certain papers that could never be found when I wanted them, yet I was sure that they had been in such and such place."

"So you told me."

"Do you think it possible that Henry took them when he went away?"

"But, you had missed them before that."

"Well, maybe he took 'em before that. Maybe he took 'em when he found it was all up with his marryin' my Eliza."

"Ha!"

"What?"

"You think, then, that out of revenge he may have taken them to deprive Robert of any portion in the property?"

"Yes."

"But, it was Henry's, anyhow."

"I know it was, but they told me somethin' at that time about a will that my wife might 'a' made—"

"Yes, yes; the estate was disposable, in her case, under the circumstances and according to the law, but it is not so with John Ransom, as he holds it. If she made a will—"

"And she did, I am sure of it; in fact, I know it."

"And what about that will?"

"I don't know, but maybe Henry did—all about it."

"Ah! ah! Maybe we are getting light here. It would be to Henry's interest to destroy any such will as that—"

"And he had no love for Robert, after what happened. He could have no love for him, as you will agree with me. But, I never thought Henry Ransom was such a scoundrel as that."

"Well, there is a fight on, Mr. Rockaway, and I am in it on your side. John Ransom has forged my name, and he shall pay dearly for it, I promise him."

CHAPTER IX.

BICYCLE BOB HITS MYSTERY.

Once safely around the corner mentioned, Bicycle Bob quickly reduced his speed to the eight-mile limit, or less.

He had no desire to have the police down on him again for violation of the regulations in that respect, and had accomplished his object without much trouble.

"Poor old chappie!" he said to himself, as he pedaled leisurely along, really going faster than he appeared to be

moving, owing to the high gear of his machine. "I hated to run away from him in that fashion, but it is time I was getting back to the place."

He referred to his mother's place of business.

"Wonder how he is makin' out, anyhow? It was foolish of him to try to catch me, for it would take Gilles, or Neggsmith, or Reilly, or one of that gang to do that, if I let her out. But, I wonder what made him so 'cited? I must tell mamma about him. I wish now I had found out where he is going to stop, for I would like to fall in with him again, honest."

In due time he was at his mother's dress-making establishment, a handsome suite of rooms.

Leaving his wheel in its accustomed place, he entered the rooms with his cap in his hand, with the air of a young gentleman, and at once sought his mother.

Many ladies of fashion were present, and even he was not by any means permitted to enter the sanctorum where the mysteries of the art were held sacred, and where many a "love of a gown" was created.

He announced his return, and waited.

In due time his mother came to him and received the result of the errand he had just performed.

"Ar, you real busy, mamma?" he asked.

"As busy as I can be, Robbie," was the reply. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I wanted to tell you about a queer old chappie that I had an adventure with while I was out."

"I shoul' like to hear about it, Robbie, really, you know, but it will keep till we go home, won't it?"

"No matter, mamma; but, tell me, will you, what your first name is?"

"My first name?"

"Yes."

"Is it possible that you do not know it?"

"Never heard it in my life, mamma. Never heard you called anything but madam."

"True, true," sadly. "No one knows me by any other name, I guess, for my past is dead and buried. My first name is Eliza, Robbie. Now, tell me what put it into your head to ask such a question as that?"

"Why, that queer old man wanted to know, and he was going to make me tell whether or not, even though I didn't know. And what do you think—he was bent on my bringing him home with me to see you. Oh! it is so, mamma, every word of it is so."

"Tell me more, Robbie, more!" she urged, excitedly.

"But, you are busy, mamma, and—"

"Tell me more about him, at once! You did not hear his name?"

"Didn't I, though? It was a funny old name, just the name to fit such a funny old chappie—"

"What was it? What was it?"

"Reuben Rockaway—Why, mamma, what is the matter?"

The woman had turned deathly white, and had dropped upon the nearest chair.

"What is it, mamma?" the boy urged. "Shall I call Miss Jones or Miss Pfeiffer? You look so badly."

"No, no, wait! Step out and tell Miss Jones to take my place for a few minutes. Tell her I will be there presently. Then come right back to me."

"Yes, mamma."

Bob left the room to obey, wondering what it could be he had said that had so affected his mother.

It came to him, as he thought of it, that it must have been the old gentle-

man's name. She had been eager to hear that, and on hearing it had almost fainted.

He was back again in a few moments.

"Now, mamma," he said.

"Tell me all about it, Robbie," she directed.

She had greatly recovered now, though she was still somewhat pale.

Bicycle Bob told what had happened, and what had passed between him and the old gentleman from first to last.

His mother listened to the end, with only an interruption now and again to keep the thread of the narrative straight, or to draw out some point unmentioned.

"Would you know that man again, the one who stole the papers?" she asked, when he had done.

"Yes, I could not mistake his face, mamma."

"Then there is a great work for you to do, Robbie, and you must do it, though I hate to allow you to run into possible danger."

"What is it, mamma?"

"You must find that man, somehow, and get those papers back again!"

"Why, mamma, I am only a boy, and not much of a boy at that. One would think I was a chief of police, the way you talk."

"No matter; you must do it—you are the only one who can do it, for you are the only one interested in the matter who saw the man's face to remember it, no doubt."

"Oh, no; others saw him—"

"But, who were they? Not one of them can be found."

"Well, that's so, I guess."

"You are the only one, I tell you—the only one. You must find that man, Robbie—you must find him!"

"Why are you so interested, mamma?"

"I cannot tell you that—not now, at any rate."

"Do you know who the old gentleman was?"

"Yes, yes, I know!"

"Who was he, then?"

"Nor can I tell you that, either. You must not ask me, and you must not, under any circumstances, allow him to know where I am, so that he can find me—you must promise me that you will not."

Bob was more amazed than he had ever been in his life.

"But, what if I do find the man, mamma," he said, further; "I cannot take the papers from him."

"Only find him, that is all! I think you can do that. You were cute enough to find the man who robbed my store that time, when the detectives had failed on the case."

"That was more luck than anything else."

"No matter; you found him. Find this man, and then we will have an officer go with you and arrest him."

"And then what?"

"The papers must be brought here to me—"

"To you?"

"Yes."

"But, they are not yours, mamma!"

"No matter; I must have them. Do not fail me, Robbie. I trust it all to you."

"But, they belong to the old man, mamma—"

"He shall have them, my boy, all but one—God grant that that one may be among them!"

Her fervent words, almost in prayer, and her serious manner, caused the boy to look at her in amazement. He had never seen his mother like this in all his life before.

"Then you will not see the old gentleman, mamma?"

"No! no! not under any circumstances! If you should see him again, you must not let him question you."

"But he will do that."

"Then you must keep out of his way. And yet, and yet I want to know where he is stopping, if you can find that out. Do not answer his questions about me, though. Do not tell him that you have said a word to me. But, above all things, find the man who stole the papers, and bring them to me."

"I'll try, mamma."

"And I know you will succeed—you must succeed! Here is money—you may need more than you have at present. Your time is all your own, my son, and you must discover that man. And yet—and yet you must not go into danger, Robbie; you must not go into places where it would be dangerous to go. Find the man, and then go straight to the police. Do you understand?"

"Yes, mamma."

"They will help you, for they will be eager to capture the man and recover the property—Heavens! there is an obstacle!"

"What is that?"

"They will restore the papers to the man who lost them—from whom they were taken, I mean, and I shall get no chance to look at them!"

"That's so, if they do the business, mamma."

"And it will be impossible for you to do it alone. It will have to be left that way, but you can let me know immediately of their success, and then I will go and see him."

"But, you don't know where he is."

"No, but the police will know, and you can find out for me through them."

"But if I can get the papers myself, without their help—"

"If you could only do that! But, of course, you can't. My boy must not go into danger, for were I to lose you my life would not be worth living."

"Don't you worry about me, mamma," giving her a fond kiss. "I am going to stick to you as close as a tire sticks to a rim. And now I am off on the hunt for that fellow with the papers."

"And good luck to you! Do not remain out at night; I do not mean that, you understand—"

"I know you don't; but, if I should, you mustn't worry and get out the police to look for me. If I shouldn't show up in a couple of days, that would be another thing. Ta-ta!"

Blowing her another kiss from the tips of his fingers, he left the rooms and got out his wheel to take the trail.

CHAPTER X.

BOB STRIKES THE TRAIL.

Bicycle Bob had but one starting point—the place where he had met with his mishap and the thief had escaped; but what use to go there? What could he hope to find, so long after the adventure?

Still, what else could he do—where else go to make a beginning?

Mounting his wheel, he set off, that place his objective point.

Not far had he gone, however, at ordinary speed, when he saw a fellow who had given way to the temptation for a swift run, and was coming along like the wind.

No policeman on wheels or otherwise was in sight.

Bob looked and admired, and in his heart felt a strong desire to let himself out and try the fellow a spurt, but, even as he looked something happened.

Two young ladies wheeled slowly out

of one of the cross streets, just as the scorcher came along, and before they could avoid him, or he could even swerve his course, he had dashed into one of them, throwing her over, and breaking her machine.

Not only that, but he evidently had injured her, likewise.

The other young lady, who had so narrowly escaped, dismounted immediately, to lend assistance to her companion.

Bob, of course, expected to see the scorcher stop and lend aid, after what he had done, but, instead, after one frightened glance, the fellow speeded away.

Bob took in the situation at a glance. No other wheelman was near enough to capture the fellow, and, unless he gave chase, he would escape.

The fellow's cowardly and inhuman act in running away had thoroughly roused the right-hearted lad to resentment, and in a moment he made up his mind that he would overhaul the young man if his short legs could do it.

Turning, he fell in behind and began to apply the pressure.

Geared high, his machine responded immediately, and while not working over rapidly, he soon found he was gaining.

The frame of his machine was smaller than that of the other, but the wheels were the same, and it being higher geared gave Bob a slight advantage.

But, it was a man's legs against a boy's, and it was likely to become a case of endurance and muscle if it was kept up for any great while.

Bob's scheme was to steal up as close as possible before discovery, so that when the man let himself out he would be near at hand.

He was gaining, as said, when the man took a swift glance back over his shoulder and saw him.

Immediately he put on steam, so to say.

Bob did the same, and there being no longer reason for his keeping silent, he shouted:

"Stop that fellow! Stop him!"

This was for a double purpose. In the first place, it would explain why he himself was speeding, and it might be the means of the other's quick arrest.

Bob was now applying all his muscle, and his wheel was fairly spinning over the smooth pavement. At the same time the other was not making slow progress.

"Stop him! Stop him!"

So Bob continued to shout, and his cries drew attention.

Men and women looked and saw; the word was passed, and in a brief time people far ahead were looking back.

Then, presently, a couple of blue-coats were observed, and they put themselves in the way of the coming flyers, with arms and legs spread out, so they looked like big X's.

Seeing them, the man in advance slowed up, and in a few seconds Bob was up with him.

"Curse you, boy!" he hissed at the spirited lad. "What did you do this for?"

"You had no business to leave those ladies the way you did, that is what I did it for."

"I couldn't help running into them; they were too slow to get out of their own way, even. Besides, they got rattled and slowed up more than ever right in front of me."

"And you going for all you were worth."

"That was nothing to you."

"I wouldn't meddled, if you had stopped like a man and helped them after you had run 'em down."

They had now run on to the policemen.

"What's all this about?" demanded one of the officers.

"Let him tell you," said Bob.

"Why, I had a slight accident back there," explained the man, and he gave a glance at Bob, to see if he might modify the facts any. "Ran into a lady, purely accidental, and this boy took it into his head that I ought to be arrested, that is all."

"Did you injure the lady?"

"Why, I did not stop. The accident was not great enough to unseat me, you see, and I thought it had been slight."

"How about it, boy?"

"He sent the woman and her wheel to the ground, sir, and ran right on and left her there," promptly answered Bob. "That was what made me mad, and I made up my mind that he should be caught."

"And you mean to say you kept up with him on that thing?"

The frame of Bob's wheel made its appearance deceiving, and it was looked upon with contempt.

"That is the thing that did it," he assured, proudly.

"And you on it, bantam?" the other officer.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, are you going to hold me?" asked the reckless rider. "If you are not, I would—"

"Going to hold you? Of course, we are going to hold you, and find out what damage you have done. How far is it to where this accident took place?"

Bob named the street where it had occurred.

"Well, we'll go there," said the officer who had asked the question. "No, you needn't mount, my man," he added. "We prefer to keep you where we can lay a hand on you."

The fellow growled, and, turning to Bob, muttered:

"I'll get square with you for this, some time or other, you see if I don't! You had no business to meddle with what did not concern you."

"That will do for you, sir," admonished one of the officers. "The boy has done just the right thing. You fellows have no right to go scorchin' the way ye do, anyhow."

"I wasn't going a bit faster than eight miles an hour."

"How about that, boy?"

"Let the injured ones answer the question," was responded. "I have done all I set out to do."

Bob was allowed to ride his wheel back to the scene of the accident, the other having to walk the entire distance, one officer holding to him and the other to his wheel.

As they drew near, Bob noticed that quite a crowd had collected.

The accident must have been even more serious than he had thought it to be, and he noticed that the prisoner's face paled.

Bicycle Bob dropped off his wheel as they entered the crowd, and fell in behind the officers with their prisoner. In this way he was enabled to penetrate to the center of the throng.

Other officers were there by that time.

The injured young woman was lying on the pavement, unconscious, and it was whispered around that one of her legs was broken.

One of the policemen had taken off his coat and folded it and put it under her head, and she was being made as comfortable as possible, while they awaited the coming of an ambulance that had been called.

Her companion was kneeling beside her, rubbing her hands and calling her name.

"Young woman, would you know the man who run her down?" asked one of the officers who had just reached the scene.

"Yes, sir, I would know him anywhere," was the response, looking up. "Ah! that is he, sir!" she added, catching sight of the prisoner. "I cannot be mistaken."

"That settles it. We'll have to take care of you, sir. This speeding business has got to be stopped, and you are likely to get a pretty stiff dose if this young woman is inclined to push the matter. Here comes the ambulance; clear the way!"

The clang of the ambulance bell was heard at that moment, and there was a scattering of the crowd.

Bicycle Bob was for the moment forgotten.

He was eager, now, to sneak away, for he was afraid of being held as a witness.

With the movement of the crowd, he drew back with his wheel from the place where the policemen were standing, and was watching his chance to get out and away when sight of a certain face caused him a start.

There in the crowd, drawn thither by the excitement, was the very man for whom he was going in search!

There could be no mistaking that face; it was the very man!

Bob gave a low whistle.

"Here is luck!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "Now, if I can only sneak away from the other fellows and follow him, I'll be all hunk. But, there is another man with him, sure's I live!"

Bob worked his way out of their line of vision, without drawing attention to himself, and when they had seen the young woman lifted into the ambulance they turned away and proceeded along the avenue, in the direction in which Bob had been going.

"Two to one," murmured the young street steerer to himself, "and not much of a one at that, but I am going to stick to 'em like a patch to a tire."

CHAPTER XI.

BICYCLE BOB'S BIG RISKS.

The elder of the two men has already been described.

The younger was a man apparently forty years of age, wearing a full beard.

He was clad in a suit of grayish material, decidedly English in cut and make. His companion was clad altogether in black, with neck wear of rather old style.

Had it not been that Bob had taken particular pains to fix the face well in mind, he might have doubted that he had run upon his man. They went leisurely along, seemingly innocent of all guile and careless of being seen, after what one of them had done.

Their spotter followed them at a safe distance, doing nothing to draw their attention.

They continued on, idly sauntering, apparently with no objective point in mind, merely seeing the sights.

This, presently, grew rather tiresome to the young rider, and seeing a shop at which he had had some small repairs done to his wheel, he hastened forward and entered it.

"Keep my wheel a little while, Barney?" he requested, knowing the name of the proprietor, and even as he spoke he braced it against the wall.

He knew it would be safe there.

"Certainly, Bob; leave it right there."

Then the lad was out and away again. The two men were still in sight.

To creep up nearer was his plan, and he did so.

"If I can only locate them," he said to himself, "and get hold of those papers for mamma, that is all I ask. But, I wonder what she wants of them? She has known old Mr. Rockaway some time or other, that I now understand. There is more in this than my head can take in."

Try as he would, he could not figure it out, however.

After going a considerable distance, the two men turned suddenly and retraced their steps.

Bob was looking intently in a shop window when they passed, and if they gave him any attention at all it was merely a passing glance. Evidently they had no suspicion of him.

As they passed he heard the elder remark:

"Shall we be back in time to keep the appointment?"

"Just about, but it will do no harm to quicken our pace a little."

In a mirror backing to the window saw the younger consult his watch.

They passed on; the boy followed, until they came to their destination.

That destination was a leading hotel at which Englishmen usually put up.

They entered; so did their young shadow.

His two suspects entered the reading-room, and there took seats.

Why should not Bob do likewise?

He did do likewise, and taking a chair so near that he was almost within touch.

"Is the time up?" asked the elder.

"Yes, and a little more."

"Then he had ought to be here."

"He may be late. He had a rather difficult task, you know."

"But he had plenty of time to do it in. Tiffs is seldom behind when he makes an appointment."

"In London, but here it is different. He is not in his own garret, as you might say, and what would be an easy thing there might be a difficult one in this city."

"Ha! speak of the Old Boy—"

"Sure enough!"

A dark, slim, clean shaved man approached them and saluted.

"What is the word?" inquired the shriveled old man immediately. "Be seated and tell us."

The younger man moved one space along on the settee, and the newcomer dropped down between them. Bicycle Bob was just on the other side his head resting on his hands, pretending to be half asleep and unobserving.

There was a sudden grasp on his arm. He had been watching, nevertheless, and he knew it was the newcomer who had taken hold of him.

His heart was in his throat instantly.

"What are you doing here?" was demanded, with the clutch upon his arm.

"Eh?" queried Bob, rubbing his eyes to conceal his face partly.

"What are you doing here, I ask you? I know you."

"Please, sir, I'm waitin' for my papa," answered the boy, in the most natural manner imaginable. "Please let go my arm."

The man released him, but he said:

"You may be waiting for your papa; I don't know anything about that, but it strikes me, rather, that you are listening and sying. Have you seen this chap before, Mr. Rand?"

"The boy that chased—"

"Exactly," the other cut short. "What are we to do with him?"

"Please, sir, I don't know what you are talking about," innocently, from the boy.

"Well, we do, my little man, and that is enough," remarked the dark, slim man. "We want to talk with you a little, but don't be alarmed."

"Please, sir, my papa said I musn't talk with strangers, and he said he would be back in a little while," finessed Bob.

"Well, it will be all right when your pa comes, little chap. In the meantime, how did you leave the old man and his carpetbag?"

Bob realized that it was no longer any use trying to play innocent, but what else could he do?

"I must mind my pa," he insisted. "He said I musn't talk, and I won't."

With that he resumed his former posture, and gave no heed to further questions or remarks.

It had all been said in low tone, all around, so that no attention had been drawn to them.

"Let us go elsewhere," suggested the dark, slim man. "We know who this boy is, and we are bound to suspect that he is here for no good purpose to us. Suppose we retire to your room."

"All right," agreed the youngest of the trio, "but let us go first and wet whistles."

"Not a bad suggestion after that walk," assented the eldest.

All arose and went out.

At the door Bob saw them look back, and they had no sooner disappeared than he made a break for the office.

"What room does Mr. Rand occupy?" he inquired.

"Mr. Rand?" queried the clerk, puzzled.

"Think that's the name; old man with a million wrinkles and a sharp mustache and pointed beard."

"Ah! I see. You mean Mr. Ransom."

Bob gave a start.

That was his own name, and what business had this old fellow with it?

"Yes, that was it, I guess," he agreed promptly enough. "I got it twisted. Which room?"

"Who are you, though?"

"I'm a private messenger, sir."

"Oh, all right. The room is No. 14, on the next floor. Any of the porters will show you."

"What's the other man's name?"

"What other?"

"One with Ransom."

"Same name, my boy."

"All right then; I'm all hunk."

Bob was about to take a big risk, if he could make it work, and that remained to be seen.

He had been in this hotel before, and had no necessity for asking any of the porters the way to room 14. In fact, he had been in that very room, on his mother's business.

It was a suite of two rooms and a bath, as he remembered.

Making all haste up the stairs, he tried the door, and, to his delight, found that the door was unlocked.

He entered in a hurry, closing the door after him, and took a swift survey around. It was a dangerous venture, as he well knew; but, he reasoned, it was no hanging matter; they were not at all likely to take his life if they discovered him, and his mother was so eager for the stolen papers!

The door of the bathroom was partly open, and he thought of dodging in there, but the risk was great.

Was there not a better place?

The next moment he saw just such a place as he wanted, and made haste to take possession of it.

It was behind the bureau, with its high beveled mirror, which stood across a corner instead of flat against the wall. In an instant he had hold of it, a pull gave him room to squeeze in behind, and another pull brought it back to its place.

Less than a minute later the door opened.

CHAPTER XII.

BICYCLE BOB WAS THERE.

The three men entered, the oldest of the trio in the lead.

It was the dark, slim man who closed the door, and when he had done so he rubbed his hands and smiled.

"Does it not prove that I was not mistaken?" he demanded of the youngest of the three. "The lad did not wait long for his pa when we gave him the chance to get away; ha! ha! ha!"

"Oh! it was he, Henry, sure enough," assured the old man. "I knew him when my attention was called to him."

"But what was he doing there?"

"Spying, I tell you."

"It is hard to believe."

"Is it? Wait until you hear my report."

"Then, by all means let us hear it."

The youngest of the trio seemed to be impatient as well as incredulous.

They took seats but a little distance from the bureau, and Bob not only could hear but could see them, looking out under the frame of the beveled mirror, with little or no danger of discovery, as he had made the crack very narrow.

"By the way, before I begin, I want to warn your uncle never again to take such a risk as he did this day."

"Eh, what's that?" demanded the old man.

"I say, never again take such a risk as you did this morning. The wonder is that you were not nabbed and lodged in Bailey—so to speak. I trembled for you."

"So did I," echoed the younger.

"But, think of the game at stake," reminded the eldest.

"I know that, but you should have waited, sir. The risk was not worth it."

"I couldn't wait, with the prize so near. I acted, and what was the result?" The papers are here safe and sound, and before to-morrow noon will be on their way to England."

"Yes, by luck, nothing else, sir. Your chances were only one in a thousand to get away with that carpetbag when you picked it up."

"But, I did get away with it! Ha! ha!"

"Yes; but never do such a rash act again, if you expect me to stand by you, sir—"

"Don't mention it, sir, don't mention it! It will not be necessary to do anything rash again. But, your mission?" he urged.

"Well, I located the man."

"You did? Good! And where?"

"At the Astor House."

"And under his own name, of course?"

"Yes; Thomas Smyth, of London, England. But, that is not all."

"What more? He does not expect to sail on the same ship with us? If that is the case, we must take another."

"That is a possibility, sir, but I do not know it to be a fact. But, that was not what I meant. That old fellow, Reuben Rockaway, is also at the Astor House—"

"Ah—ha!"

"And he and this man Smyth are putting their heads together. Smyth is no fool, and it is just possible that he may

give you trouble, yet. And then, this boy, he is in it somewhere, and it is just possible that Smyth is making use of him. We must leave this hotel."

"What for?"

"What for! Have we not allowed the boy to go? and does not he know where we are located? That is what for!"

"You may be mistaken in your suspicion respecting him."

"Not a bit of it. I am as sure as that I am alive. He piloted the old fellow to a detective's office, and the fact that I found him here playing the spy upon you clinches the case against him. I wanted to tweak his nose, but it would never have done to draw attention to ourselves that way."

"Well, what has been done, and what is yet to be done?"

"The thing to be done is to get away from here before the possibility of an arrest becomes a reality."

"Then you think—"

"I know, that just as soon as that cub reports where you are there will be an officer here after those papers, and you will not sail for England to-morrow as you intend."

This gave the old man his first shock of real alarm.

He looked in the direction of the bureau, and Bicycle Bob drew back in dismay.

For the moment the boy did not stop to consider how narrow the crack was through which he was looking, and it seemed as if the old man was looking straight at him.

"We must do that," the old fellow admitted. "And yet, it is a pity a man can't take what belongs to him—"

"But, the manner of the taking, my dear sir!"

"Everything is fair in war."

"You took the carpetsack, as the old man called it, and that makes out the case against you. Clear case, Mr. Ransom, and the best thing you can do is to keep out of that old rustic's way."

"Yes, yes, we'll do that. Henry, where shall we go?"

"How would it do to go on board ship, at once?" suggested the younger man.

He spoke more to the dark, thin man, than to the other, evidently holding his opinion worth more in the matter.

"There are objections, sir."

"Name them."

"In the first place, that cub of a boy, or some one else, may follow, and you might be found there as easily as anywhere else."

"Too bad the steamer does sail this hour."

"Yes, so it is; but, that does not help the matter any. Then, another objection: if the detective the old fellow has employed knows anything he will make a search of the steamships about to sail."

"Then in heaven's name what are we to do?"

"There is another way, that I would suggest if I might—"

"Don't waste words, sir, but suggest it."

"Start immediately for Canada and sail from there under assumed names."

"And there is an objection to that, on my part," put in the youngest of the three.

"What is it?" asked the old man.

"I have not succeeded in the search I want to make."

"What search? Have we not got the papers? What more do you ask for, I want to know?"

"Nothing, so far as you are concerned."

"Then what do you mean?"

"Did I not tell you that I meant to look up the woman if I could?"

"What woman?"

"Confound it, sir, you exasperate me. I am sure I told you all about it. Is your memory so short?"

"I must have been asleep, if you told me anything about a woman. My memory is not so poor that I cannot remember things from day to day. When did you tell me?"

"Coming over."

"You will have to tell me again, if it is important. If it is not I do not want to hear it."

"You are brusque about it."

"I had only one errand here, and that has been accomplished."

"Well, I had two, and only one has been completed. I want to learn something about Robert—"

"Hang Robert! Dead these dozen years and more."

"That is it; I want proof of that. More, I want to find his widow, if living."

"Ah! that is the woman, eh?"

"As I told you."

"Don't remember a word about it; must have been asleep."

"May I advise again?" here put in the dark, slim man, in his over-respectful manner.

"Yes, yes; speak right out."

"I would say drop that for this trip. Come again, if you will, but do not waste an hour more than necessary now. If your uncle had left it all to me, I would have had those papers and no one to blame—"

"But, I didn't, sir, I didn't; I couldn't resist the taking of them when the chance was there."

"And hence are liable to arrest."

"We must change the hotel; that is the way out of it," advised the old man, decisively. "Our passages have been paid, and we cannot afford to lose that and the extra fares besides."

"It is at a risk, sir."

"No matter; we must take some risk. I can't lose all that money. Henry, you go immediately and inquire about another inn."

"You insist?"

"I do."

"You will not go to Canada?" asked Tiffs.

"No, no! You, Tiffs, go and get a four-wheeler and have it ready. I will get our things together while you are out."

"Do you suppose a four-wheeler is known by that name here in New York, uncle?"

"No matter, Tiffs, do as you are bid."

The dark, slim man saluted and withdrew.

"You, Henry, go and see about new quarters, as I told you, or you will never get a penny of the estate—do you hear me, sir. Tiffs can keep his eyes open for us, and we'll be safe enough."

The younger man responded, and withdrew with a scowl on his face.

CHAPTER XIII.

BOB GETS INTO TROUBLE

John Ransom smiled a wicked, meaning smile, and stepped quickly and lightly to the door.

Securing it, he rubbed his hands together gleefully and turned back again into the room, his smile having broadened into a cunning grin.

"Bicycle Bob was watching."

"Ha! ha!" the old man chuckled. "What do they take me for? Do they think I would let an opportunity like

that pass me, just for the fear of being arrested? Not I!"

He chuckled the more, and rubbed his hands as if washing them.

"And I must have my eye on you, Henry, my boy, I must have my eye on you. You would give everything but your life to get those papers into your possession. I must have my eye on you. Ha! ha! Why shouldn't I risk arrest, for the sake of getting the papers ahead of you?"

For a moment longer he continued the motion of washing his hands, all the time chuckling to himself.

"How will I do it?" he then spoke half aloud, looking around in an eager manner. "I must make the papers safe, and at the same time must fool him, for I would not trust him if my back were turned. How will I do it? Ah! I have it; the very idea!"

Again he laughed to himself.

He hastened to the bureau and pulled out the lowest drawer.

It had been locked, and he had had the key in his pocket, evidently, as it appeared to Bob.

When he rose up he had a bundle of papers in his hands, and his hands were trembling with eager nervousness and haste.

"That is what I will do, that is what I will do!" he said to himself. "I will put these down in the big bag, and will carry the little one in my hand, never letting go of it."

He laughed at his own cleverness.

"If anybody is inclined to steal them from me, he will think they are surely in the little bag, and will pay no attention to the big one. That will go through, all right, and once I get it home I will give the documents a safer place than they had before."

Three bags were standing on the floor near at hand.

One of these was a hand grip, and the others two large valises such as many tourists use.

He opened one of these, and down into the centre of it shoved the papers, arranging some of the other articles over them so that they were not likely to be discovered easily.

That done, he took up the smaller bag and placed it on a chair.

He now unlocked the door, and proceeded with his work of packing up the belongings of himself and nephew.

Presently he entered the bath, closing the door after him, and Bob felt that it was now or never with him. He shoved one end of the bureau around and slipped out.

The big valise was not far away, and for a part of the distance the way to it was partly concealed from the bathroom door.

Bob took a look in the direction of the bathroom, and saw the door was still closed.

Swiftly, and in silence, Bob made his way to the big valise and thrust in his hand.

It was so much like stealing that he trembled, for that was a thing he had never done and never expected to do, but, now, for the time being, he was to all intents and purposes an officer of the law recovering stolen property.

It took him but a moment to get hold of the packet of papers; another to replace things as they had been; another to slip backwards to his place of hiding.

Barely out of sight, however, was he, when the door of the bath room opened.

Bob had not had time to replace the bureau, and to touch it now invited discovery.

It stood out a foot from the wall on one side, and a perspiration appeared on the boy's face at the thought of discovery, which he now felt must surely follow.

He looked out through the crack, and stood ready to make a dash for the hall door, if discovered.

The old man came straight towards the bureau.

He pulled out another of the drawers, and as it opened a little hard it pulled the bureau out further from the corner.

This the old fellow noticed, and he pushed it back about as it had been in the first place, and Bicycle Bob drew a full breath once more. He thanked his lucky star!

About that time the hall door opened, Tiffs re-entered and announced that a conveyance was ready.

"And so am I, Tiffs, so am I," asserted the old man, seizing the small handbag and taking a death grip upon it, apparently.

"Are you all packed?"

"Yes, all packed—Ah! would you mind fastening that valise? I forgot that."

"With pleasure, sir."

This the dark man did, Mr. Ransom watching him narrowly, and about the time that was accomplished Henry Ransom came in.

"Ready?" he demanded.

"All ready, my boy; all ready!"

"The papers?"

"Don't worry about the papers; I have them all right."

The younger man cast a glance at the handbag, to which his uncle was holding so tightly, and appeared satisfied.

"You have got another lodging?"

"We'll go to the — House for a change."

"All right; anywhere. It makes no difference. By the way, Tiffs?"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw nothing of that boy again?"

"Not a hair of him, sir, nor any other suspicious characters around."

"Ah! that is good. I hope you were mistaken, and that he was not spying upon us, anyhow."

"Well, I hope so, sir, if that is any satisfaction to you. Now, if you are ready we will be off, for it is dangerous to waste any more time here."

"One moment."

"What is it?" asked Henry.

"About those valises, can't we send them direct to the steamer?"

"Why, I suppose so, and for the matter of that they can be marked all the way through to destination."

"Then that is what we'll have done with them—or with mine, at any rate. I don't want to be bothered looking after it. Here is enough right here to look after," and he indicated the handbag.

"All right, uncle; we'll attend to that, at the office. Shall I carry that bag for you, too?"

"No, no, no; never mind this little thing," insisted the old man, pulling it back, with a cunning wink. "I can take care of this, my boy. You look after the other business."

"All right; I guess you will hold fast to it."

"Trust me for that."

So, after a glance around, to make sure they were leaving none of their belongings, they left the apartment.

Bicycle Bob never felt so elated in all his life.

Waiting a few moments, he then slipped from his place of hiding and made for the door.

Opening it, he peered cautiously out before venturing forth, and finding the coast all clear, he passed out and hurried away without waiting to close the door.

He made his way to a staircase that descended to a side street, to avoid the main entrance.

Descending without undue haste, he was quickly out.

There a surprise was awaiting him. A carriage was standing at the curb, and Mr. Ransom was just in the act of getting in!

On the ground stood Mr. Tiffs, assisting the old gentleman—although he was agile enough and needed no assisting, and just as Bob appeared Mr. Tiffs looked around.

"Ha! there you are?"

Quick as thought he left the old gentleman, and, before Bob could dodge, he was seized by the collar.

"So you were not watching, eh?" the man demanded, letting his knuckles be keenly felt. "Maybe you can say what you are doing here? Where have you been, anyhow?"

"Ha! that boy again!" exclaimed Mr. Ransom.

"You ought to wring his neck, Tiffs," snarled Henry, savagely.

"I will take care of him," said the thin man. "You drive on and I will see you later."

He gave a sign to the driver and the carriage rolled away, and when it had gone he led Bob up the street, still holding to his shoulder.

"Now, my son, I want to know all about it," he demanded.

"I don't know anything about it, sir," Bob whimpered. "You musn't take me away from here, for pa won't find me when he comes if you do."

"Then he will have to hunt for you, that is all. You come along with me. I'll be father and uncle and brother and everything else to you for awhile, you whelp!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BOB WINS TO LOSE.

Bicycle Bob now had the whole matter in his possession.

He had outstripped the police, the private detective was not "in it" with him at all, and yet, at the last moment, he had been caught, and was now a prisoner!

It was galling to think of it. He had unearthed the rascal who had stolen the documents; not only so, but he had recovered them and they were now on his person. Then, he knew where the brace of rascals were going to locate for the night.

He must get away from his captor, somehow, and that before he could discover that he had the papers.

"What are you goin' to do with me?" he whimpered.

"I am going to take a walk with you, for one thing, so that you will not follow that carriage, as you intended doing."

"Indeed, I wasn't going to do that, sir, honor true and honor bright I wasn't sir."

"There, there; none of your lying, for that will not help you."

"But, I'm not lying, sir."

"Maybe not. It don't make any difference. I know that you are not going to follow the carriage, and that is enough. Where were you hiding, anyhow, when I looked for you?"

"Was you lookin' for me?"

"Answer my question."

"I was waitin' for my pa, that was all, sir, and if you didn't see me again it was 'cause you didn't look in the right

place. I tell you true that I kept out of your way all I could."

"Yes, it looks as if you did, that's the fact."

"Please let me go."

"Where do you live?"

"Over in Brooklyn, sir."

This was a whopper, but Bob dared not reveal his residence to that man.

"Then, what are you doing away over here? That is not a likely story, my lad."

"I might as well tell you lies as tell you the truth, then," said Bob to that, "for you don't believe me anyhow. Didn't I tell you my pa left me here? I want to go back, sir."

"Yes, after awhile, perhaps, if you are a very good boy. We'll wait, though, until that carriage is well out of the way first. By the way, what is your name?"

"Tommy, sir."

"Tommy what?"

"Tucker, sir."

"Ha! ha! ha! Well, you can lie with a vengeance, when you set out to do it. Maybe that florid old gentleman was your father, eh? His name was Rock-away, though."

"It is no use my talkin'," asserted Bob. "Don't ask me any more questions, please."

He pretended to be offended.

Nevertheless, the man tried hard to get something out of him, but with little result.

The shrewd boy noticed one thing with gratification, and that was that the man was taking him up the avenue in the direction of the shop where he had left his "bike."

Once let him get hold of that, and get on it, and he would soon bid adieu to Mr. Tiffs and all the rest of them! He had done his work, though he found it hard to realize that it was so.

In order to lure the man on, Bob consented to talk, and rattled away at a great rate, telling any quantity of nonsense and more than once causing the man to smile at some of the quaint combinations of words and phrases in his chatter.

At last they came to the shop.

All the way along Bob had been trying to devise some scheme whereby he could shake off the man long enough to get his wheel and mount it.

"Well, have we come far enough?" the man asked, stopping directly in front of the shop.

"Just as you say," answered Bob, looking at him in a curious manner.

He half believed that the man had either read his purpose, or else knew where he had left his wheel.

"Well, then, suppose we walk back. You may yet be in time to meet your pa on his return, and if not, I guess you are cute enough to find your way to Brooklyn unaided."

So, they started on their return.

When they had gone about far enough for a purpose Bob had hatched, the boy stopped.

"Hold on, here!" he said, clapping his hand to his pocket. "I must have dropped it back there where we stopped, Mr. Tiffs. Just wait till I run back and see."

The man had long ago released his hold upon him.

Bob started back towards the shop, on a half trot, pretending to look for something on the ground as he ran.

The man looked after him in something of astonishment, at first. He did not quite see through the trick, yet expected that something of the kind was in the boy's mind.

But, he did not care, now; it would

suit his purpose better to get entirely rid of the lad.

When Bob reached the shop, however, and entered, then it dawned upon the man like a flash.

The first time he had seen the boy had been on the occasion of his catch by the policeman for riding too fast, at the time of the stealing of the carpetbag from the old countryman.

"Ha! his wheel!"

In another moment Bob reappeared, bringing his wheel with him, and he mounted it at once.

Then, in a spirit of banter and bravado, he could not resist the temptation to ride back where he had left his late captor and have something to say to him.

"So, that was what you lost, was it?" the man asked, as he came up.

"That was it, sir. Much obliged to you for leading me up this way. The very place I wanted to come to."

"Well, look out you don't lose something else, before we get done with you, my boy! I give you fair warning this time that it will not go easy with you the next."

"How would you like to try a race to the police station?" asked Bob in banter.

"The police station? What are you going there for?"

"Oh, I am one of the detective force, that is all, and I have a report to make."

"You whelp! I'll—"

"Ta-ta! See you later, old fossil!"

The man made a dart out into the street, with the evident intention of capturing the boy again, but the young street steerer had but to exert his muscles and his wheel responded to his call.

But, fatal mishap!

At that moment Bob felt something slip out of his pocket, and heard it drop to the ground.

In an instant he knew what it was—the precious papers which he had risked so much to get hold of, and which he had so much desire to take to his mother.

He heard immediately a shout of exultation behind him.

Turning as quickly as possible, he saw the dark man making off with the packet as fast as he could go, down a side street.

"Thief! Thief!"

So yelled Bob at the top of his voice, and he was quickly spinning in pursuit of the fellow.

"Stop that man!" he shouted. "Stop thief, stop thief! Police! Do not let him escape! Stop him! Stop him! Stop thief! Stop thief!"

He yelled as loudly as he could, and attention was called to the man before he had gotten half a block away. Several men started after him, the same as after the older man earlier in the day.

The dark man looked back, and evidently saw that he was bound to lose in the race. It would be next to impossible for him to throw Bob off, for the boy could keep up with him without effort. But just then, as if luck was determined to favor the scamp, he came to where a bicycle was standing by the curb.

To the great surprise of Bicycle Bob, the man seized it, vaulted onto the saddle, and darted off in a direct line, showing that he was an expert rider!

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH BOB STRIKES A BARGAIN.

Bicycle Bob was dismayed. What kind of a wheel was this? Was the man an expert?

Two thoughts that caused him to tremble for the recovery of those papers.

Now, too late, the lad blamed himself for not having started straight for home on getting his wheel out of the shop.

Though dismayed, he had not hesitated about acting. He had put on muscle the moment he saw what the man was about to do, and was almost upon him by the time he got started.

"Thief!" he cried. "Thief! Thief!"

The owner of the bicycle came running out of a shop he had entered.

Seeing his wheel speeding away, he joined in the cry and started after the man as fast as he could run.

Others joined in the shouting, and before the dark man had gone half a block it seemed to him as if half the city was at his heels and everybody yelling at him.

Nevertheless, on he sped, like the wind.

Bicycle Bob soon found that the man was drawing away from him, in spite of his best efforts.

Shouting like a young Indian, Bob fairly stood up on his pedals, and he began to scorch as perhaps he had never done before inside the city limits.

Yet in spite of all his efforts he saw the man drawing slowly away from him, and he realized that if the race lasted a mile he would be the loser, or at any rate it looked so then.

He could see, however, that the machine did not fit its new rider. It was not adjusted to his height.

That encouraged him, for the man was not riding with comfort.

"Gores on the bias!" he cried in chagrin, borrowing something he had heard in his mother's shop. "He is bound to beat me, if somebody else don't take a hand in. I wish he would run into a beer wagon and break his neck."

At that point the man wheeled into an avenue where the splendid stretch of asphalt added to his already high speed, and away he shot.

Bob was not far behind, but he was losing, though slowly.

The moment he struck the better pavement, however, his speed increased, and then it became nip and tuck.

Bob still kept up his shouting, and people ahead hearing him made all haste possible to get out of the way and give the speeders a clear road for their scorching.

One or two policemen made an effort to intercept them, but they did not succeed.

By pretending to turn one way and then quickly dodging the other, they both shot by like birds on the wing, almost.

"I hope I am better off for wind than he is, anyway," Bob tried to give himself some hope. "I am a laster, when I get my second supply, and it is coming."

There was no escape for the man now, save by sticking to his wheel, and no escape that way save by tiring out his pursuer and dodging all who placed themselves in his way. Once stopped, and he was done for. Hence, he must keep up the pace.

On and on they sped, and it seemed to Bob as if it would never end. Where were the police?

Some were seen, but they were too late to do anything.

At last Bob found that he was gaining a trifle, and this gave him big encouragement.

He yelled the more, and put on all the pressure his short legs were capable of exerting, and it was soon more and more apparent that he was creeping up in the race.

People everywhere were looking, and

the street was cleared for half a block ahead all the time.

"Whew!" cried Bob. "I wish Schuessler with his seventy-eight, or Thomsen with his seventy-seven, would appear on the scene! I'll bet we would soon end the business!"

The names mentioned were those of crack riders of the police bicycle squad. But, the end was at hand.

The man was tiring out, and Bob saw that he was gaining more rapidly than at any time before.

His own wind was good; he kept up the pressure for all there was in him, and crept up and up, until he was close upon the man he was after.

He had ceased his shouting, now, and the man glancing back over his shoulder was startled to find how near the boy was to him. He tried another spurt, but had to relax, and then the young racer had him.

Bob ran up, laid hold upon the man's coat, and called for help.

He slowed his speed, and in another minute the man was forced to dismount; then Bob grappled with him.

The man's strength was spent, and the agile boy was able to hold him, while he called loudly for police!

In a few moments policemen were on the spot.

"What is wrong here?" one demanded.

"This man is a thief," panted Bob. "He stole papers from me, and then stole the bike to get away on."

"No—no—lie—" labored the other.

"It is no lie," insisted Bob. "He has got the papers in that pocket," indicating, "and the wheel he took from in front of No. — street. I must have those papers."

"It is false, all false—all false—" the other panted.

"It is true," urged Bob. "You take us to the station, policeman, and see if I don't prove it's true. He is a rascal, and if he don't get lodged in jail it will be funny."

The man tried to get out of it, but it was of no use. It was a case of violation of the speed regulation, anyhow; so to the station they had to go, and there Bicycle Bob told the whole matter so far as the papers were concerned and his hot scorch after them.

The man was searched and the papers found.

"Whose papers are these?" asked the police captain.

"They belong to my grandfather," answered Bob, the first thing that came to mind.

"And who is your grandfather?"

"His name is Reuben Rockaway, sir."

"That name is certainly on the packet," admitted the captain. "What have you to say now, my man?"

"I have to say that the papers do not belong to Reuben Rockaway, but to another gentleman, and that they were stolen by this boy from the — Hotel, in some way."

It would have puzzled Tiffs to tell how.

"And who did John Ransom steal them from in the first place?" cried Bob.

"Mr. Captain, ain't your men on the lookout for a man that stole a carpetbag from an old gentleman this morning at the corner of — street and — avenue? Well, these are the papers he took out of it."

"Reuben Rockaway! Why, certainly, that was the name. Now stopping at the Astor House."

"Yes, sir, that's him, and I must take the papers to him."

"I'll send a man with you."

"But, I have got to go home first, sir. Not much out of my way, and my mother wants to go with me."

"Very well, my lad; you can go around that way and pick her up, but the detective had better take charge of the papers—"

"That ain't fair," protested Bob, with an injured air. "I'm the one that recovered 'em, and I ought to have the honor of taking them back to granddad, don't you think?"

"Well, I suppose a grandson would take as good care of them as a police detective, but you are only a boy, and you can tell the old man you found them for him. It would be a good thing if we could get the others—"

"If you will make sure of this fellow and give me the papers, I will tell you where they are," announced the boy.

Tiffs looked at him dumfounded.

"You know where they are?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir; and if you will give me those papers, and let me take 'em straight to granddad, I'll tell you, and you'll get the honor of scooping 'em."

"It is a bargain. Here are the papers! Now, where are the men to be found?"

"They have just gone to the — House, sir."

CHAPTER XVI.

BOB BEATS THE BAND.

Tiffs was completely floored, hearing that.

He had once been a London detective, until he had brought disgrace upon the force, and now he knew where Bob had gotten his information.

Seeing that the game was up, he turned to the police captain and said:

"Our game is lost, and Reuben Rockaway will want proof for some things he will charge against John Ransom and his nephew. Let me turn over to his side, and I'll peach the whole business."

Bob did not wait to hear more than that, but left the station and hastened home on his wheel.

The day was by that time far spent.

Madam Ransom was about closing her place of business for the day, save that a sewing force remained until a later hour.

"Mamma! Mamma!" cried Bob, breaking in like a whirlwind. "I have found the man and got the papers! Here they are! Whoop—hooray! But, what a scorch I have had!"

"Yes, and a scorch for a fortune, perhaps," said his mother, as with pallid face and trembling hands she opened the packet. And she took the papers up one after another, looking eagerly for one that had especial import for her. Presently she found it.

"Thank God!" she cried, and sank down on a chair.

"What is it, mamma?"

"Proof that my father demanded I should produce before I ever darkened his doors again, when I went to him with you a babe in my arms, my boy. Proof that I was your father's lawful wife—my marriage certificate!"

"Who was your father, mamma?"

"Who was he? Who but the Reuben Rockaway you met this morning—"

"Seams and gussets! Then he was my sur-enough granddad, wasn't he! I told the police he was, just for cod. Whoop—hooray!"

"But, where is he, Robbie dear? I must go to him with these papers, for it is important that action should be taken immediately. And, he must know who you are, and that you recovered them!"

"Come right along then, mamma, for I am going right to him with the documents. He is at the Astor House, where he is waiting for his detective to get on the track of the rascals. Oh! but *won't* there be a jubilee when we open our guns on them!"

Detective Williams had just called at the Astor House and had been shown to Reuben Rockaway's room.

He had come to report what progress he had been able to make on the case he had undertaken. He had found that passage had been spoken on a certain ship that was to sail on the morrow. He had traced the men to the — Hotel, but there had lost them. They had changed their lodging. If they undertook to sail by that steamer, their capture was certain.

He had just rendered this report, when there came a knock at the door, and Mr. Smyth rose and opened it. In walked Bicycle Bob, and behind him his mother, who, pausing only an instant to look around, advanced towards her father. The old man already had caught sight of Bob, and he exclaimed:

"What! My bicycle boy again? And I am sure he brings me good news. What is it, my laddie?"

"Bet your life it's good news, granddad!" cried Bob. "Here are your papers, safe and sound as a dollar, and here is my mother came to see you, sir."

He stepped aside, and his mother took his place.

"Yes, father, come to see you once more!" the woman spoke in kindly tone, "and here is the proof you demanded, that I was indeed the wife of Robert Ransom."

She held the marriage certificate out to him.

The old man was white like death, and seemed utterly bewildered for the moment.

"The boy," he said. "He called me granddad! Is it true—can it be true, that you are indeed my daughter, my Eliza? God be praised for his great goodness to me!"

He held out his arms, and the woman threw herself upon his breast, softly sobbing. And Thomas Smyth, taking Bob by the hand, heartily congratulated him upon his good fortune, which he had saved for himself by the recovery of the lost papers!

Detective Williams wanted to know all about it, and, while Mrs. Ransom and her father were talking confidentially, little Robert told him all about it, and when he learned that the rascals had been arrested the detective was surprised indeed. He complimented Bob highly upon the success he had met with, saying that he was already a full-fledged detective.

Bob bore it all modestly, and the next hour was spent joyfully.

When the excitement had calmed and their heads had cooled, then the detective suggested the necessity of going to prefer charges against the prisoners.

Just then, however, came another knock at the door, and on its being opened a police detective entered with the man Tiffs.

"Tiffs!" exclaimed Smyth.

"As you see," the response.

"And are you a prisoner with them?"

"Yes, but I am on your side. I'm just the man you want."

"Well, I should say you are. We are all right now, Mr. Rockaway; the whole game is ours."

"Have the arrests been made?" asked Williams.

"Yes, thanks to this boy's good work," answered the police detective.

"You are an imp on a wheel, that is what you are, lad," declared Tiffs, emphatically. "I thought I was something of a rider myself, but you can outwind me on a long pull."

"But, that wheel didn't fit you right," Bob suggested.

"No, and I am out of practice; that's another thing. If I had had my own machine, and been in trim, I think you wouldn't have come out where you did."

"And I'll bet you wouldn't have lost me, either," declared the boy. "I would have clung to you like a chain to a sprocket, if it had killed me. I am getting in trim to join the Boulevard wheel-police."

"There is one or two things I would like to know, my lad."

"Name 'em."

"How you knew where Mr. Ransom and his nephew had gone, and how you got hold of the papers."

Bob laughed.

"That is a secret," he answered. "It would be unprofessional to tell just how the little trick was done, you know. It will be something for you to puzzle your mind over."

Arrangements were made for a meeting next day, when they would attend the hearing of the two prisoners, and after appearing and making charges against them the happy old countryman was taken home by his daughter, where the greater part of the night was spent in talking over bygone days.

At the hearing, next day, John Ransom appeared stubborn and defiant at first, declaring himself innocent of all the charges and defying them to prove anything against him. He had not learned, as yet, that the stolen papers had been recovered, but supposed they were in the valise and safe on board the steamer. Judge of his surprise and consternation, then, when they were produced!

It went hard with him and his rascally nephew.

In the beginning, John Ransom had obtained and destroyed such proofs as he could get hold of concerning his brother's marriage, and had narrowly escaped prison at that time. His brother died, leaving a widow with two sons, and it was the motive of his life, then, to cheat them of their inheritance. He came to America, prowled around Rockaway's place and picked up all the information he could, and learned the rivalry between the brothers for Eliza Rockaway. Out of that he resolved to make capital.

He saw where Eliza's preference lay, and incited Henry all he could to jealousy. Henry had been well sounded, and when the time was ripe the uncle induced him to steal all the papers in the case and deliver them to him. The motive was, with Henry, being the elder of the two brothers, to come in for all the estate himself by destroying his brother's claim to any share in it. This was the bait the uncle held out. But, once the uncle got hold of the papers he had Henry in his power, and the young man had to live on his bounty. Robert wedded Eliza, with the result shown, and time passed.

Then came the day when John Ransom had the falling out with his attorney, Smyth, and the latter, having the papers in keeping, started for America to deliver them to Reuben Rockaway to revenge himself upon the miserly Ransom. As soon as Ransom heard of this he set out in hot pursuit, with Henry and the man we have seen enough of—

Tiffs. The latter, having been a detective, handled the case for them. They were too late to intercept Smyth, but they undertook to undo the work he had done by alluring Mr. Rockaway to New York, in his name, and they might have succeeded had not a kind Providence thrown "Bicycle Bob" in their way.

Needless to say, they got their deserts. Both died in prison.

As for the missing Robert, Bob's father, he was never heard of, nor was any clew to him ever obtained. As the marriage certificate had been found among the papers in the possession of the uncle, however, it was always believed that either he or Henry, or both of them together, had had a hand in his disappearance, with a purpose. If so, they died with their secret.

Madam Ransom sold out her business to two of her foreladies, and retired with her son to old Reuben Rockaway's place to gladden the old man's latter days. Bob took his bicycle, and, although he now rides one of a larger frame, yet he declares that there never was such a wheel as the one upon which he did his scorching for the fortune that in due time became his.

THE END.

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